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From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors

An Account and an Evaluation

Jerome H. Black

Strengthening Canadian Democracy

IRPP

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Strengthening Canadian Democracy / Renforcer la démocratie canadienne

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Since the 1960s, increased levels of education and changing social values have prompted calls for increased democratic participation, both in Canada and internationally. Some modest reforms have been implemented in this country, but for the most part the avenues provided for public participation lag behind the demand. The Strengthening Canadian Democracy research program explores some of the democratic lacunae in Canada's political system. In proposing reforms, the focus is on how the legitimacy of our system of government can be strengthened before disengagement from politics and public alienation accelerate unduly.

Depuis les années 1960, le relèvement du niveau d'éducation et l'évolution des valeurs sociales ont suscité au Canada comme ailleurs des appels en faveur d'une participation démocratique élargie. Si quelques modestes réformes ont été mises en œuvre dans notre pays, les mesures envisagées pour étendre cette participation restent largement insuffisantes au regard de la demande exprimée. Ce programme de recherche examine certaines des lacunes démocratiques du système canadien et propose des réformes qui amélioreraient la participation publique, s'intéressant par le fait même aux moyens d'affermir la légitimité de notre système de gouvernement pour contrer le désengagement de plus en plus marqué de la population vis-à-vis de la politique.

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Strengthening Canadian Democracy / *Renforcer la démocratie canadienne*

Editors' Note

When the IRPP published the first paper in the Strengthening Canadian Democracy (SCD) series in September 2000, our opening observation was that Canada's political institutions have stood largely unaltered since their creation and might benefit from some critical appraisal. One important exception to this institutional inertia is the method used to register voters for elections. The traditional approach in Canada was door-to-door enumeration carried out just before an election. In 1997 this approach was abandoned in favour of a permanent voters list, formally known as the National Register of Electors. Regularly updated with information from a variety of government data sources, the permanent list is now used to generate the preliminary list of electors when an election is called, with further adjustments and updates undertaken throughout the campaign period.

If the new registration regime was put in place without much fanfare, it has since become the focus of considerable public attention. Concerns were raised during the 2000 federal election about flaws in the new system that left would-be voters unregistered and uncertain about the necessary remedial measures. Similar concerns were voiced during the 1999 campaign in Ontario, which used the National Register to generate the preliminary list of electors for its election. The province, along with others, now maintains its own permanent list.

These concerns are based largely on anecdotal evidence. Jerome H. Black's contribution in this issue of *Choices* represents a systematic and rigorous investigation, providing both an account and an evaluation of the switch from enumeration to a permanent voters list.

The account outlines the conditions that created momentum for change and the particular alignment of forces that carried the day. In addition to shedding light on the motivations behind the change in registration regimes, the analysis provides a framework for examining the preconditions for other reforms to Canada's political institutions, highlighting the significant hurdles that must be overcome in bringing about institutional overhaul.

In his evaluation of the new approach to voter registration, Black focuses on one fundamental dimension – the impact on electoral participation. Again, this takes us back to the beginning of the SCD series. Richard Johnston's lead-off piece ("Canadian Elections at the Millennium," *Choices*, 6, no. 6, September 2000), which pointed to declining voter turnout over the past decade as an indicator that all is not well with Canadian politics at the millennium. But whereas Johnston's analysis focused on the shortcomings of Canada's party and electoral systems, Black's focuses on the significance of a new registration system that places a greater burden on voters to ensure that they are properly registered.

Black also enters another distinct area of investigation, inequalities in voter participation across demographic groups, focusing in particular on age and income differentials in turnout. Again, this is terrain explored in an earlier SCD piece, from a different vantage point. Henry Milner ("Civic Literacy in Comparative Context: Why Canadians Should Be Concerned," *Policy Matters*, 2, no 2, July 2001) highlighted the importance of inequalities in "civic literacy" to disparities in political participation. Black's analysis again draws our attention to administrative barriers: certain groups, already disadvantaged in one way or another, are less likely than others to find themselves on the permanent voters list, and consequently face greater hurdles to voting in elections. To what extent does this exacerbate participation inequalities?

The answers Black provides to this and other questions are persuasive and compelling. He draws on his findings to recommend a variety of measures, parallel with the efforts that Elections Canada has been making to shore up the new system, to ensure that the National Register of Electors functions effectively in the future, particularly in facilitating robust and broad-based voter participation, an important objective for all who hope to see democracy rejuvenated in this country.

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From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors: An Account and an Evaluation

Jerome H. Black

Introduction

As with most processes designed to regulate aspects of political life, the decision to establish a particular voter registration regime entails making significant choices. In one sense, the task can be portrayed as a mechanical endeavour, the need to select from among alternative methods, each of which strikes a different balance between guaranteeing that qualified citizens have unimpeded access to the vote, on the one hand, and ensuring the integrity of the voting process by guarding against voter fraud, on the other. Registration approaches also differ in their degree of support for certain secondary, but nonetheless important, functions of the electoral system, such as allowing for the mobilization of voters by providing parties with lists of electors. Registration systems also vary along other key dimensions, such as operational costs and the quality of the resulting lists. While such considerations are often regarded as establishing appropriate criteria for evaluating the performance of different registration regimes, they can also be thought of as objectives that the process might be expected to meet. The selection of a registration method, however, can also be understood within a more philosophical context where central principles and values establish a priority as to the most important purposes that the chosen approach should serve. Characterizing the decision in this way follows from the recognition that in attaching a greater weight to particular objectives, different registration regimes elevate some principles to a higher status than others.[1]

A key principle underlying Canada's approach to registration for federal (and most provincial) elections for much of the twentiety century, and around which there seems to have been a strong consensus, was that the state should assume the onus of ensuring that all eligible citizens were listed as electors.[2] This belief was

manifested in the country's postwrit or election-specific enumeration approach, through the practice of carrying out a door-to-door canvass that used enumerators who determined and recorded eligible voters. The resulting compilation, carried out once the writs had been issued and used solely for the election at hand, became the preliminary list of electors. Typically, there would be several visitations for those initially missed or not at home, and while at some point the onus shifted to the uncontacted (and thus unlisted) individual to take some minor steps to become registered, the dominant thrust of the approach amounted to a reaching out on the part of the state – literally to the doorsteps of the citizenry. With the state assuming the initiative, the effort required or "costs" incurred by the individual were quite minimal.[3] Moreover, in employing a virtual army of enumerators (e.g., about 110,000 enumerators were used for the 1988 election), the massive canvassing effort was able to capture a very high proportion of the eligible population.[4] It also served to enhance inclusion, particularly since it drew into the political process the kinds of individuals, such as the young, the poor and those with little formal education, who otherwise would be less likely to take the initiative to participate.[5] This proactive approach, which was the essence of enumeration, worked to augment voter turnout among all segments of society and thus mitigated a natural tendency toward *participation inequality* in electoral politics.

The fact that registration was undertaken just before an election also served to ensure that currency and accuracy would characterize the registration information compiled. Close sequencing resulted in a reasonably up-to-date list of electors identified at their current addresses and, consequently, preliminary lists that contained a minimum number of errors, either of exclusion (eligible voters not listed) or of inclusion (ineligible voters listed). Thus, enumeration captured those who had changed residence, an important characteristic in a country with a high mobility rate, as well as new citizens who were constantly entering the electorate along with the newly age-eligible. The timely nature of postwrit enumeration also meant that the false listing of those who had emigrated or passed away was kept to a minimum.

This model, with state initiative at its core, had come to define Canadian tradition, and moreover constituted, as Boyer notes, a practice that was unique in the world.[6] While he goes on to point out that a major criticism of the approach is its prolongation of the campaign (because of the time requirement of enumeration), Boyer also states that the "most telling recommendation for it is that approximately 98% of all eligible voters are registered."[7] He also cites, with apparent approval, Ward's own positive verdict on the approach, including how the Canadian experience has "furnished conclusive evidence that the making of voters' lists is a proper state function."[8] For his part, Qualter also sees virtue in a system that generates an up-to-date and accurate list of electors, and does so, moreover, "at relatively low cost."[9] Courtney and Smith make the strongest and most carefully constructed case for the traditional system, highlighting its advantages not only in absolute terms but also relative to alternative approaches. They too emphasize the ability of the enumeration method to reach out to all kinds of individuals:

> Enumeration possesses the potential for incorporating those with special needs into the eligible electorate. These include electors in hospitals and prisons, those with physical and mental disabilities, and the homeless, the poor and the illiterate. For such people, a system that depends upon self-registration may well have a repressive effect on their willingness or capacity to be included on the list of electors. (p. 433)

They also believe that the personal contact inherent in enumeration can be beneficial in and of itself:

> A system that places the onus for registration on the state rather than on the citizen and that is coupled with door-to-door enumeration serves as a personal reminder by the community of the positive value that it places on electoral participation by its citizens. The approach of a pending election is heralded through human contact. (p. 433)

While not all academics have embraced enumeration as the ideal model,[10] the greater emphasis on its merits is certainly part of a broader consensus that has existed about its value as a uniquely Canadian institution.

More to the point, enumeration had long stood the test of official scrutiny and reflection, including evaluation against other methods of registration. As recently as 1986, a *White Paper on Election Law Reform* reaffirmed a preference for the traditional system as opposed to either permanent-list forms of registration or annual enumerations.[11] Though the white paper identifies some problems with enumeration, including the increasing difficulty some returning officers were having finding competent enumerators, these were spelled out in the context of recommendations designed to remedy these problematic aspects. Moreover, the report lists the main arguments typically offered on behalf of alternative approaches. The advantages of a permanent voters

list, for example, are cited as being a shortened campaign period and the elimination of both the "duplication of effort at the three levels" of government (realizable through computerization) as well as the confusion of voters caught up in overlapping registration efforts. Overall, however, the recommendation to maintain enumeration was forceful and strongly justified. Compared to a permanent-list approach, it was regarded as a less costly method. Moreover, it was argued that a permanent list "would not necessarily be more accurate, more complete or more up-to-date than the present enumeration system unless strict controls or compulsory registration were imposed,"[14] and would be unacceptable to Canadians concerned about the threat to privacy entailed in the maintenance of permanent records. It seemed, then, that support for Canada's traditional system of enumeration was solid.

Ten years later, however, the postwrit enumeration system was abandoned. It was replaced by a permanent-list approach based on the compilation and maintenance of a voters register. Bill C-63,[15] which received Royal Assent on December 18, 1996, mandated the implementation of the new system for all electoral events (elections, by-elections and referendums) at the federal level. The National Register (formally, the National Register of Electors) was subsequently established following a final door-to-door enumeration that was carried out in April 1997, which, in turn, generated the preliminary lists for the ensuing June election.[16] The legislation also reduced the minimum period of an election campaign from 47 to 36 days.[17]

The National Register itself was established as an "automated database" containing the name, gender, date of birth and address of each Canadian citizen eligible to vote. Given that the standing expectation is for about 20 percent of the listed information to alter each year as a result of address changes (16 percent), new 18-year-olds (2 percent), new citizens (1 percent) and deaths (1 percent),[18] regular updating of the permanent list is regarded as being imperative. This is done by incorporating new information from federal departments, particularly the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, as well as provincial motor registration and vital statistics agencies. The system is also designed to incorporate voting lists from other jurisdictions. The commitment to maintain the register in as up-to-date a fashion as possible distinguishes this approach as an "open" or "continuous" permanent-list form.[19] So too does the commitment to provide ample opportunities for unlisted individuals to register during an official revision period and on voting day itself. These latter opportunities are vital because no updating processes can sufficiently track and record the enormous number of demographic and eligibility changes that constantly occur.

What happened? Why was enumeration, given its strong official endorsement as late as 1986, replaced by a permanent list? The question has even greater import considering that the changeover occurred fairly quickly, indeed within a remarkably short time frame, given that a major "representational building block," to use Courtney's words,[20] was at stake. Moreover, the change was part of a 1990s trend that witnessed five provinces adopt their own registers, joining British Columbia, which had (exceptionally) long relied on a permanent list.[21] Accounting for the switch in registration regimes at the national level is one of two principal and interrelated tasks undertaken in this paper. The other is to evaluate the performance of the new system in facilitating the electoral participation of Canadians.

In examining these two dimensions, this paper follows up on an earlier project[22] that provided some initial exploration in both areas. That effort, in fact, identified most of the antecedent factors that appeared relevant for a rudimentary understanding of the changeover in registration regimes. The current contribution provides a more systematic account of what happened, and in the process outlines the major developments that unfolded over the period in question. Beyond this descriptive aspect, an emphasis is placed on the role played by Elections Canada and the chief electoral officer in implementing the new system. This portrayal consists mainly in considering what motivated the agency to take the lead in pressing for change and, as well, the kinds of arguments it advanced in order to convince other major actors about both the need for, and the benefits of, such a switch. These aspects are dealt with in Part 1. Part 2 similarly follows up on the earlier study, which had identified the main issues and criteria that are relevant for comparative assessments of the two methods of generating voters lists. In the current study, the emphasis is placed on the implications for voter turnout in Canada, exploring these in connection with participation levels among both the general population and the poorer and less established segments of society (what is characterized as equality of participation). The growing concern over decline in voter turnout and nonvoting in Canada provides an important justification for such a focus. Moreover, one of the key conclusions drawn in Part 1 is

that relatively limited attention was given to the possible consequences the changeover might have for the electoral participation of Canadians. This sets up the central question explored in Part 2: whether the alteration in registration methods has resulted in reduced voter turnout. The paper closes with a reiteration of the main conclusions, some reflections on their implications and a discussion of issues and possibilities in the development of the new regime.

Part 1: Replacing Enumeration with a Permanent List

The preliminary study, designed to frame relevant questions for this more extensive work, identified most of the factors that had a bearing on the changeover in regimes and, as well, indicated that many of them operated in such a way as to reinforce each other's influence.[9] They included increasing concern over difficulties with the enumeration system and a sense that a permanent list would resolve these, while at the same time delivering the additional advantage of cost savings and a shorter campaign period. Achieving economies was an especially attractive prospect in a climate wherein neoliberal principles, centred on fiscal conservatism and a scaling back of government, continued to gain ascendancy. This new environment was also characterized by a concern to reduce duplication of effort and expenditures in the federation, so that the prospect of shared voters lists, and thus even more savings, added to the appeal of a permanent list. A more immediate factor was the close sequencing of the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Accord and the 1993 general election. This proximity allowed for the use of the 1992 lists, outside of Quebec at least, in the 1993 election, establishing a precedent for the "reuse" of lists[10] and thereby helping to legitimize the argument for a permanent list. Also consequential was a 1992 recommendation by the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (RCERPF, or Lortie Commission) to move toward a register, albeit a provincially based one.[11] The 1989 auditor general's report was additionally identified as having relevance insofar as it motivated Elections Canada to integrate new computer technology into its operations, upon which any successful and cost-effective permanent list would ultimately depend. Finally, Elections Canada and Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley were characterized as being strongly supportive of the change.

Independently, Courtney has since provided his own brief account of the reasons for the advent of a permanent list, but he is more explicit in identifying the near-perfect alignment of pressures and motivations that culminated in the change.[12] He does so by drawing upon some fundamental aspects of organizational-innovation theory, particularly the propositions that innovation is most likely to occur when motivation is strong, the obstacles to change are weak and resources are available to overcome any obstacle. Based on information gained from interviews, he writes:

> There was at the time (1) strong support from the prime minister (Jean Chretien) and a conviction on the part of important political handlers in the prime minister's office (such as Jerry Yanover) that change was highly desirable; (2) a notable absence of political opposition to the change in Parliament and indifference on the part of the public and media to the issue; and (3) ample resources to overcome such obstacles as there might have been. Those resources included Elections Canada's identification of a set of problems with the existing system packaged together with a proposed solution to those problems; the Lortie Commission's qualified endorsement of a move away from door-to-door enumeration; the high priority accorded the legislation's speedy passage by the minister responsible for election administration [Herb Gray] and by the cabinet generally; and the attraction that the claims about the cost savings held for the parliamentarians.[13]

Courtney also points out, and rightly so, that the switch was facilitated by a consensus surrounding a single alternative. The fact that some provinces supported and were interested in future co-operation also served to expedite change.[14]

In short, both studies understand the alteration in voter registration regimes (and as well the relative quickness of the change) as resulting from a matrix of forces and events that pushed in the same direction; moreover, these converging factors operated without much in the way of counterveiling pressures. Cast at this level, the explanation for the changeover is fairly straightforward and hardly a mysterious affair. Still, as both accounts are quite brief, there is a clear need for more extensive documentation. A chronological analysis helps to meet this need, while also affording an opportunity to specify the essential differences between the two registration approaches and review the kinds of arguments and claims that can be made on behalf of each. A chronological and descriptive narrative also meets the second objective

of Part 1, namely to document the key role played by Elections Canada, including the chief electoral officer, in engineering the changeover. To anticipate, it is maintained that the agency and Chief Electoral Officer Kingsley were pivotal in two ways. First of all, they took advantage of opportunities within an evolving political context from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s in which reform of the electoral process was under serious and active consideration. While the developments associated with this period can themselves be seen as certainly having some relevance for the eventual emergence of a permanent-list system, their impact is largely due to the mediating efforts of Elections Canada. As the agency committed itself to the idea of a register, it gave expression and shape to these background forces and made them more pertinent and weighty. Elections Canada was also pivotal in a second sense, as they subsequently embarked upon a strategy to demonstrate the technical and economic feasibility of a permanent list in order to sell the idea to elected officials. Moreover, they did so at an opportune time, when both government and the main opposition parties found the arguments for change especially compelling and indeed self-serving.

The Backdrop to Change: The White Paper, Two Reports, and the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing

The idea of a change in the registration regime gained momentum during a period of broad reflection and debate on Canada's electoral law. Prompted by concerns about the inappropriate and outdated nature of current legislation and practice, especially in light of new Charter-based realities and lags in the use of new technology, a consensus developed around the need to countenance reform in many areas, though not in the electoral system itself. The 1986 white paper and the RCERPF were both products of, and in turn contributed to, this context of questioning and the contemplation of change. At the same time, they differed considerably in the conclusions they drew about replacing the enumeration system. Two other reports, discussed in a moment, also helped define this period, and these too made reference to registration matters.

The white paper's impact on subsequent developments is probably best understood as being an indirect one. While it did initiate debate on reform in many key areas, in the particular case of voter registration it ended up, as already noted, reaffirming a commitment to enumeration. Still, it did list some of the potential benefits associated with a permanent list and indicated the changes that would be needed to make it a more feasible and acceptable alternative. As well, the white paper alluded to the chief difficulty with the enumeration system, one that had been slowly developing over the years – a shortage of qualified enumerators.[7]

The chief electoral officer's 1989 statutory report[8] can be similarly identified as having reinforced the general sense as to the need for reform without making any direct contribution to the idea of substituting the enumeration system. While it acknowledges the shortage of qualified enumerators as a problem by listing the various discretionary measures that returning officers had to take in the 1988 election, at no point does it call the enumeration approach itself into question, and it certainly makes no mention of replacing it. The concern with the need for reform in other areas is, however, very much in evidence. Chapter 2, "The Crisis in Election Administration," succinctly lists the various issues and pressures that were threatening to overwhelm the agency (pp. 9–12). One of these was the challenge of adopting new computer technology, a task made more difficult by understaffing and outdated legislative arrangements. At the same time, the report indicates that some steps had been taken in the use of computers and office automation, including during the 1988 election.

The auditor general's report, also issued in 1989, acknowledged these developments but regarded them as insufficient.[9] It emphasized that far too much work was still being done manually, particularly with regard to enumeration and revision, and that even in those areas where computers were being employed disparate software programs were being used. The message, strongly conveyed, was that Elections Canada needed to become more efficient and to seek economies through a greater reliance on information technology and standardized software. The report pushed the case further by noting that computerization could result in additional cost reductions through the development of common procedures with other jurisdictions and the sharing of both information and tasks. It also recognized Elections Canada's difficulty in finding enumerators, though it provided no further commentary in this regard. Still, in urging the agency to embrace fully technology and computerization and, as well, to engage in co-operative endeavours with other jurisdictions, the auditor general's report may have contributed to the change that eventually occurred. After all, it was generally understood that the only way that a permanent-list approach could be rendered sufficiently cost-effective, and thus have a chance of being considered seriously, was

through the use of automation to handle the necessary large-scale data collection and data management tasks. As will be discussed below, the report apparently served as a catalyst in moving Elections Canada to embrace technological change.

The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (RCERPF), without doubt, provided the most extensive commentary and analysis on enumeration and its possible replacement by a register. Its impact is evident in the way that it added to the general climate for change and, more specifically, enhanced the legitimacy of a permanent-list approach as a serious alternative to enumeration. Indeed, the RCERPF was, in fact, required as part of its mandate to report on "the compiling of voters' lists, including the advisability of the establishment of a permanent voters' list."[10] In the end, it proposed moving toward a register-based system. This added considerable momentum to the notion that change was desirable, and certainly the commission's arguments and recommendations were often employed (though at times in a selective fashion) and became frequent points of departure and reference in the discourse of those supporting a shift.

More particularly, the RCERPF's main analysis and conclusions on voter registration are spelled out in two chapters of volume 2 of its final report, one dealing with the enumeration system (chapter 1, "The Registration of Voters"), the other with the permanent-list approach (chapter 4, "A Register of Voters"). The significance of the former is the concrete expression it gave to the scale of the decline in the quality of the canvassing effort: "The critical issue that was raised time and again at our public hearings and that has been acknowledged by election administrators, federally and provincially, as an increasingly serious problem over the past two decades, is the number of voters who are missed by enumeration" (p. 7). The issue was regarded as having two main components. One difficulty involved the predicament that enumerators faced accessing voters at their residences. This was attributed to occupational and lifestyle changes, such as more women entering the labour force and jobs requiring more travel, all of which meant that fewer individuals were at home when enumerators called. Also noted were problems accessing multiple-unit buildings where policies restrict door-to-door contact of residences. Furthermore, it was argued that in some urban areas "personal safety makes some voters, especially the elderly and those who live alone, unwilling to respond to unannounced callers" (p. 9). The Commission acknowledged that while these were not necessarily new concerns, they were nonetheless of increasing importance and that "taken together, they make a census-type count of voters more difficult than in the past" (p. 9). Similarly, problems accessing special-needs groups such as the hearing impaired, the illiterate, those who do not speak English or French and immigrants "who may be hesitant to respond to callers representing the state given their experiences in their country of origin" were identified as having "increased substantially in both absolute and relative numbers over the past two decades" (p. 9).

The second difficulty – a more serious one that had been the subject of increasing commentary over the years – was the shortage of competent enumerators. Here, too, more women entering the labour force was a factor, since it meant that fewer individuals were available to take up enumeration duties. Personal safety concerns in urban centres "have also taken their toll" (p. 9). Moreover, candidates and political parties, which have the right, in the first instance, to nominate enumerators, had become increasingly unable or unwilling to do so. The supply of enumerators was further constrained by statutory requirements limiting appointment to qualified voters residing in the constituencies.

Importantly, chapter 1 also went on to make recommendations for improving the quality of the enumeration process by addressing these problems. These included the earlier appointment of enumerators, the appointment of "supervisory enumerators," the selection of enumerators from all registered constituency associations and from community associations, a lowering of the minimum age to 16 and, in areas where safety was not a concern, the employment of one enumerator instead of two. These measures would no doubt have gone a long way toward resolving the problems identified, and some were put in place for the 1993 election (although enumeration was not required outside of Quebec). Still, judging from comments by the proponents of a register, it was the problems of enumeration, not their recommended solutions, that stood out most in this part of the RCERPF's report.

The chapter on register systems (chapter 4) was even more influential, simply because it did indeed end up recommending that a permanent register be adopted for federal elections – although arguing that this would be affordable only if federal authorities were to rely on provincially maintained lists. The particulars of the commission's advocacy on behalf of a register can

be thought of as involving multiple (and overlapping) types of argumentation and commitments. One stressed how it would be possible to ensure that a register could be guided by some of the principles associated favourably with enumeration. This essentially entailed a commitment to maintain the principle that "registration should primarily be a state responsibility" (p. 113), along with the long-standing orientation to facilitate access to the voting process. Thus, the commission saw revision and election-day registration as being integral components of the overall process, in effect establishing the approach as an open-list system offering multiple opportunities for voters to become registered.[31] In practical terms, of course, these provisions would be necessary to compensate for the expected gaps in the register's coverage and lack of up-to-date listings of potential voters stemming from eligibility and demographic changes.

Another line of argumentation underscored the distinctive benefits of a permanent list. Principal among these was the advantages of a shorter campaign – because canvassing would no longer be necessary. This segment of the argument built on a brief section in another chapter (chapter 3, "Administering the Vote") that began by noting that a shortened campaign was seen as a major advantage of a register, favoured as it was by most intervenors before the commission (p. 77). Proponents of a shortened campaign typically claimed that "Canadians are overexposed to politics and lose interest as a result" (p. 79), that it would reduce administration costs and that it would make it easier to recruit campaign help. Opposition came from those in large ridings and from small parties with fewer campaign workers.

The case for change also involved the reiteration, often by implication, of the problems with enumeration. One point given particular emphasis was that a shared voters list would avoid the confusion of overlapping enumeration by the different levels of government. Maintaining that co-operation with other jurisdictions would bring down the overall costs of registration exemplified another critical line of argumentation, namely, addressing the concerns that had in the past surrounded the adoption of a permanent-list approach (such as its greater costs relative to enumeration). The claim that provincially maintained lists could be employed was regarded as being even more important for the idea that a register could be economically feasible. In this regard, the commission could point to its own research for backing (pp. 125–132). Other research findings, it claimed, indicated that the high quality of the stored registration information, another long-time concern with a permanent-list approach, could be ensured.

Yet another reservation about permanent lists centred on fears that citizens might have about state intrusion and the loss of privacy. In response, the commission suggested that a "high-quality voters register" could be established and maintained without the need to access confidential information in government databases (p. 124), that registration could be kept voluntary, without voters having to relinquish the right to list themselves for a particular election, and that the current legal restrictions limiting the use of lists for electoral purposes could be extended, along with the implementation of appropriate administrative and technical safeguards.

A final line of reasoning involved challenging the idea that what some regarded as distinctive benefits of the enumeration system would not necessarily be lost in the move to a register. In response to the argument that voter interest could decline without personal contact with enumerators as representatives of the state, the commission suggested (but without any supporting evidence) that the extensive campaign activity would itself produce sufficient stimulation. In a somewhat similar vein, it asserted that "a shorter election period would not diminish the time available to conduct a campaign at the local level" (p. 123) – candidates and parties would get the preliminary lists of voters earlier since they would be automatically produced from the register.[32]

Putting Elections Canada into the Picture

While it is clear that the next focal point in the narrative is Elections Canada, there are several possible ways of inserting the agency into the analysis relative to this background of significant discussion and the urging of change. One possible interpretation would be to take its subsequent role and specific advocacy of a permanent list as deriving from, and responding to, these developments in the broader environment. Another vantage point, and the one adopted here, attributes more autonomy and proactivity to the agency and, in fact, places it at the centre of an explanation of the changeover. In essence, it appears that Elections Canada was already motivated to give serious consideration to the idea of a register and, in effect, capitalized on the greater receptivity to such a change that was being engendered. This included taking advantage of the contribution that was made by the RCERPF in enhancing the legitimacy of the idea of a new registration method.

Such a perspective finds substantiation, in part, by the demonstration that the causal nexus between the

RCERPF's advocacy of a register and subsequent developments is weaker and much less direct than might be expected. Key to this characterization is the commission's recommendation of provincially maintained lists. This was simply a nonstarter for Elections Canada, and, indeed, it is difficult to imagine that the agency would ever take such a suggestion seriously, given that provincial processes and eligibility requirements differ too widely to allow it to meet its obligation for standardization and a national outlook. There is also, of course, the play of ordinary bureaucratic politics and federal-provincial considerations that suggest that the agency would have been reluctant to cede direction of the registration process. Cooperating with the provinces was one thing, yielding control was quite another. A key discussion document that would later emerge from Elections Canada makes this point in plain language:

> Elections Canada has a pan-Canadian need for complete, accurate and current electors lists. Federal electoral eligibility requirements provide a common denominator amongst federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Elections Canada is, therefore, well positioned to assume the role of leadership.[33]

Still, this did not stop the agency from repeatedly dwelling on the commission's sanctioning of a permanent-list approach as a critical source justifying a switch in registration regimes.

The initiatives that Elections Canada undertook well before the RCERPF tabled its final report (in February 1992) constitute even more persuasive evidence that the changeover was only diffusely and tenuously the result of the commission's work; more to the point, they indicate the agency's predisposition toward the adoption of a permanent-list approach. In part, these steps suggest a determined response to the growing recognition that Elections Canada needed to exploit new technology, especially computer-based technology. Still, the tight sequencing of these initiatives and corresponding developments strongly indicates that these measures were put into place with the larger goal of developing a list well in mind.

Specifically, by-elections as early as 1990 provided the agency with an opportunity to, in its own words, "test customized software for the computerization of the lists of electors."[34] That experience provided the basis for a March 1991 commitment to use procedures that had already been developed (known as Elections Canada Automated Production of Lists of Electors, or ECAPLE) to produce voters lists on a broader scale. The first opportunity to do so came in October 1992 with the referendum vote on the Charlottetown Accord, in the 220 ridings outside of the province of Quebec (which had opted to supervise the referendum under its own rules). Even if the computerized lists were drawn up in conjunction with an enumeration, this large-scale use of automation was a significant step on the road to a permanent list. More to the point, it was what Elections Canada not only believed but, as well, what it planned for. The goal was to have the finalized 1992 voters list serve as the basis for the preliminary list for the next general election, expected in 1993, thus eliminating the need for another enumeration. This would allow the agency to claim a relevant precedent in moving toward a register, since list reuse is the core principle of such a system. In practical terms, it would allow Elections Canada to point to the acquisition of necessary experience and make more concrete the ways in which the foregoing of a door-to-door canvass would save money.

The forward thinking of the organization in this regard is quite apparent. A specific provision in the 1992 *Referendum Act* allowed for reuse of the voters list for up to one year following the nationwide consultation on the Charlottetown Accord. Moreover, this intent was certainly not disguised by Elections Canada. In his report on the referendum, the chief electoral officer made it quite clear what he had in mind for the future and the importance of computer automation in achieving that objective.

> Implementation of the ECAPLE system for the referendum was an investment in the future. The system played a key role in making possible the re-use of the official lists of the referendum as preliminary lists for the 35th general election, as was foreseen in the *Referendum Act*, and its continued use offers potential for savings in future electoral events at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.[35]

Kingsley's report on the 1993 election is even more forthcoming and elaborative of what the larger objective was, and indeed includes a chapter appropriately titled "Preparing for a Continuous Register of Electors."[36] The preface to this chapter is interesting not only for its summary statement about the commitment to a register, but also for the way in which it justifies that commitment, illustrating several of the interpretations discussed above:

> In its report of February 1992, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing recommended that Elections Canada investigate ways of reducing duplicated efforts among election administrators at the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels, especially in the compilation of the voters list. From the number of submissions to the Royal

> Commission and the number of letters to Elections Canada, it is clear that methods better than door-to-door enumeration must be found to prepare the voters lists. Some form of a continuous register, that is, a voters list that is maintained and updated on a regular basis, seems to be the obvious solution. (p. 130)

As will be seen, Kingsley, in an interview with the author, confirmed an even earlier commitment to a permanent-list approach on the part of Elections Canada.

By itself, the fact that the chief electoral officer was personally strongly in favour of a change in registration methods is no minor detail. Indeed, it appears that if Elections Canada was at the centre of the process of bringing about a switch, Kingsley was its epicentre. His public reports and pronouncements, as well as his comments during the interview,[17] provide plenty of evidence of the leading role that he played. This is not to suggest that the idea originated with Kingsley. By his own admission, it was one that had been bandied about within Elections Canada before he took over, and certainly it is fathomable that over the years there would have been much "institutional reflection" on registration matters, increasing as enumeration came under intensifying scrutiny. Rather, what is a simple but nevertheless vital point to understand about Kingsley is that, as the top official, he came to hold a sturdy personal commitment to a permanent list not long after assuming the post in February 1990, and he clearly pushed for its implementation as soon as circumstances permitted. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the register coming into force as quickly as it did without his enthusiastic commitment to a new approach and without his guidance in focusing the agency's efforts in that direction.

The formal record, including Kingsley's statutory reports on the 1992 referendum and the 1993 election (both issued in January 1994), is replete with substantiating evidence and cannot possibly be read without immediately grasping the strength of the commitment to a register-based approach. A few years later, in April 1996, Kingsley would appear before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, welcomed by the chair to discuss "his favourite project, the registry of elections."[18] In October, Herb Gray stood in the House to move that Bill C-63 be referred to that same committee, commenting that "This bill stems from the report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, the Lortie Commission, and from the recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer."[19]

In the interview with the author, Kingsley corroborated the evidence on his central role, and he also helped to shed light on some important details that, in turn, reinforce the perspective that privileges the impact of the agency in the overall scheme of things. Clearly, he had thought about the possibility of a register early on. When he first arrived at Elections Canada, the Lortie Commission was in full swing, but by his own admission Kingsley initially concentrated on the problems associated with the lack of automation and standardization in drawing up voters lists for the 1988 election. Even before the RCERPF released its report, he had laid the groundwork for the development of ECAPLE for use in the 1992 referendum. At one point in the interview, he allowed that the notion to push for a register had come to him early on but that his staff warned him that "you can't go too far too fast." At other times, he talked about how, while he gave particular direction to the development of the register, it was an idea that had been "percolating" for a while in Elections Canada: "A damned good idea whose time had come," was how he described it. That it was his initiative to reuse the 1992 list is another important marker of Kingsley's early conviction; indeed, he indicated that he would have preferred to see amendments to the *Referendum Act* permitting the re-employment within two years, not one, presumably to enlarge the window of opportunity for establishing the reuse precedent. Certainly, he was unambiguous in communicating the importance of a consecutive application of the list and of its forming the basis for testing a permanent-list system.

Kingsley's claims about the primary reasons that drew him early on to the notion of a register are also consistent with other available information about how the process unfolded. He spoke of being motivated by the growing problems with enumeration and, as well, the need, as a general matter, to develop automated and standardized procedures; these were, of course, the kinds of arguments that were being widely made to justify a change in registration approaches. He also identified possible future benefits in areas such as cartography. Interestingly, he did not spontaneously mention cost considerations, which, as will been seen, came to figure prominently in arguments that were being marshalled on behalf of a register. Only when directly asked about their role did he give them some relevance, indicating that as a career civil servant he was always interested in saving money. Still, he did maintain that "Cost is a factor; it is not a driving factor." He also said he "might have had second thoughts" had the research demonstrated that the new system would cost more.

Two other factors, the idea of sharing data with the provinces and the "benefit" of having a shortened campaign period, were also not offered upfront as having primary relevance. Again, only when specifically probed about each did he indicate that they were "important secondary" considerations. Sharing does save the taxpayer money, he readily acknowledged, but it was up to the provinces to use the data. His only elaboration with regard to campaign length was to suggest, interestingly enough, that the Lortie Commission was mistaken in concluding that a 40-day campaign is possible even with enumeration; only a register, Kingsley maintained, can reduce the period to under 47 days.

His broader comments on the RCERPF reinforce the argument made above about its lesser or its more indirect impact on the emergence of the register. Kingsley even went so far as to assert, in rather blunt language, that the RCERPF's support for a provincially based approach had a negative impact on the movement toward a register. "It hindered the work of Elections Canada because it created for some provincial electoral bodies a form of tacit recognition of their centrality; some saw it as being in their hands." In fact, if the interview provided a sense that any report deserves to be singled out for having influenced his thinking and developments within Elections Canada, it was the auditor general's report, which had sharply criticized the agency's sluggishness in embracing new technology. This jolt to the agency appears to have engendered a commitment to catch up technologically and indeed, judging from Kingsley's demeanour and actions, to go much further than that.

This point merits emphasis and helps make a larger argument that the eagerness for the project was part of a broader vision, no doubt shared by Kingsley and others in Elections Canada, that the agency needed to embrace technological change and innovation unreservedly. The development of a computerized list was only one way that Elections Canada could position itself in the forefront with regard to the use of the most sophisticated technology available; other areas included digital mapping, voting by telephone, electronic voting (or "smart cards") and voting machines (including touch-screen equipment) in ballot booths.[10] A computerized voters list would fit well with and indeed facilitate these innovations. In short, it is probably fair to say that a "culture of technology" gripped Elections Canada and that the exploitation of information technology became an operating and self-evident norm. This outlook represented a conscious break with the past and with an orientation that had been criticized in the auditor general's report; by adopting the very latest in automation and other technology, the agency would be heeding the imperative to "modernize," a word that Kingsley repeatedly used as he endeavoured to promote the switchover.[11]

Beyond establishing ECAPLE, Kingsley and the agency took other concrete steps that reveal an eagerness to move expeditiously toward instituting a register. A steering committee was struck on October 20, 1993, with a mandate to "act as a coordinating body, within Elections Canada, with respect to communicating and encouraging the development of A Continuous Register of Electors."[12] By the spring of 1994, the in-house "Discussion Paper on a Continuous Register of Electors" was produced, intended to provide a "*high level overview* of the concept of the Register."[13] The document provides background commentary about registers, including the experiences of other countries, but the bulk of the treatment and its overall tone make it quite clear that what was at issue was not whether a register would be established but rather the timing and the modalities of *how* it might be brought to fruition.[14] No consideration whatsoever was given to the possibility of retaining enumeration and handling its shortcomings through remedial measures; instead, the emphasis was squarely on the need for change. To this end, there was the by now familiar litany of complaints surrounding enumeration and the advantages and opportunities that a register could confer.

Other important themes further reveal the goal-oriented nature of the document. One chapter, for instance, dealt with design considerations and some administrative and technical matters that would need to be taken into account in establishing a register (e.g., how the register might be structured, data quality considerations and the like). Perhaps most important of all was the chapter "Strategic Avenues," which dealt with the issues and obstacles, including political ones, that needed to be addressed. One section, headed "Political Will," pointed out that "politicians need to be educated about the current problems and potential solutions in a cross-jurisdictional perspective" (p. 28). The document concluded, confidently, that "key arguments support the initiation of a process that will lead to the creation of a shared Register of Electors" (p. 33).

The next step involved the steering committee setting up a special project team, in late 1994 or early 1995,[15] charged with examining "the costs and bene-

fits of a register, extensive work on new processes and procedures, evaluation of sources for updating data, consultation with potential partners, and feasibility assessment."[46] One year later, in December 1995, sufficient work had been done to allow the chief electoral officer to present the team's main findings to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs at an in camera meeting.

The project team's report, *The Register of Electors Project: A Report on Research and Feasibility*, began circulating in the spring of 1996. It declared unequivocally that study and analysis had shown that a national register was "both feasible and cost effective" (p. 5). Other assertions were set forth as additional "main conclusions." A few of these reiterated familiar themes such as how the register would allow a reduction in the election period from 47 to 36 days. Another identified the most appropriate existing sources for keeping the register up-to-date and argued that a "targeted reliability level of 80%" for the register could be maintained, meaning that the derived preliminary list would have the correct addresses for an estimated 80 percent of eligible voters. This figure was judged as "the level necessary to conduct an electoral event" (p. 5). The report also confirmed current support and future interest by other electoral agencies for a shared national register and as well dealt with the kinds of legislative changes that would be required for its creation. Finally, a key conclusion highlighted fiscal savings. While the implementation of a register at the next election would cost about the same as carrying out an election under enumeration (in large measure because a final enumeration would be necessary), each subsequent contest would allow for savings (a "cost avoidance") of $40 million, and even more as other jurisdictions joined in (p. 6).[47]

Beyond these specifics, the report's general tone reflected what had by then developed into the set strategy for selling the register, and one rooted in the logic employed by the Lortie Commission, namely, taking the problems and limitations of the enumeration approach as a point of departure, demonstrating how a permanent-list system would both ameliorate those difficulties and provide further benefits, and finally, pointing out how traditional concerns attendant with a permanent-list method could be surmounted. The latter included the argument that the voters list could indeed be effectively maintained and kept up-to-date. It was even pointed out that "electoral information would be of higher quality, because preliminary lists of electors would be produced over time and not in the tight time frames currently required during an electoral event" (p. 17).

The report also addressed the long-standing concern over invasion of privacy and confidentiality of the information that electors provided, and in several ways. First of all, it proclaimed privacy and confidentiality as core standards that had helped guide the research; this was part of the commitment to ensure that the register would preserve "certain principles and characteristics of the Canadian electoral system." There were also indications that the project team had reviewed the treatment of privacy concerns in other jurisdictions, and there were references to how there had been continuous consultations with the federal Privacy Commissioner's Office (p. 21); indeed, there was an acknowledgement that a "privacy advisor" from the office had participated in many of the workshops (p. 7).

The Politics of Change[48]

However one might characterize Elections Canada's packaging of arguments and background research to make a case for a register, it is abundantly clear that the government bought the package. Its support of an altered registration process and abbreviated campaign period is indicated most obviously by the legislative priority it attached to the changeover. On October 21, 1996, a little over half a year after the release of *The Register of Electors Project*, Bill C-63 was given first reading. The legislation moved fairly quickly through the House, receiving a third reading on November 26. The government's firm support of the initiative is further evident in the selection of Herb Gray, who was House leader and solicitor general, to shepherd the bill through the chamber. Courtney similarly notes (in passing) this turn of events as being reflective of the government's determined backing and, importantly, adds that his interviews suggested firm specific support from Jean Chrétien and the Prime Minister's Office. Political support was apparent not only from within the executive, however. It was also forthcoming from legislators as a whole. Indeed, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had signalled its approval even before the formal release of the *The Register of Electors Project* report, when members were briefed by Kingsley in December 1995. While that session, it will be recalled, was held behind closed doors, the minutes of subsequent meetings dealing with the draft legislation make it clear that there had been widespread endorsement for the register at that earlier gathering. Moreover, in the report itself the committee was characterized as having "concurred in the value of moving

to a register system, enthusiastically supported the approach proposed for its implementation, and agreed that Elections Canada should immediately prepare a report in the form of draft legislation to begin to develop the administrative mechanisms and systems needed to use a register in the fall of 1997."[49]

What is the basis of this political support? Why was the changeover given such an easy political ride? Courtney does not elaborate on what, specifically, may have motivated Chrétien, his ministers and his political advisers to embrace the change, but presumably they accepted the long-standing argument that a permanent list would resolve old problems and bring new benefits – among which the prospect of curbing expenditures would have had special appeal. While the costs associated with running the registration system had always been one of the criteria for evaluating the relative merits of different approaches, registration economics came to play an even larger role as neoliberal principles became more widespread and entrenched during this period and as the Chrétien government became convinced of the need to reduce the state's financial burden. In short, as the costs of the registration system came to be evaluated within a climate of economic restraint, the notion that a permanent voters list could save governments and taxpayers money would have generated a positive response in many quarters.

Federal-provincial politics were no doubt also a consideration. At one level, the fact that some provinces had signalled their interest in co-operating with Ottawa enhanced the prospect of the federal government using provincial sources to update the register and cut overall costs through shared voters lists. Another amenable development, alluded to earlier, was the adoption at that time of permanent lists by a growing number of provinces. On a more political level, however, Ottawa's ability to point to provincial interest and possible involvement, in an era when cross-jurisdictional conflict was more common than not, provided it with a focal point for federal-provincial co-operation and success. It also served to illustrate that concrete steps were being taken to end overlap and duplication of effort on the part of the different governments,[50] a fixation that had been intensifying as part of a general process of "rethinking government" designed to render its operations more efficient and cost-effective.[51] Thus federal-provincial co-operation meshed with savings as significant explanatory factors driving support for the register.[52]

The appeal of a reduced campaign period must have also been politically attractive to key politicians and their advisers. While most proponents of a shorter campaign touted its virtues by making the specific argument that administrative costs would be curbed or by offering the more diffuse notion that Canadians would be spared the tedium of an overly long contest, behind the scenes it may well have been understood that a condensed campaign would serve the re-election interests of an incumbent government – especially one that commanded a substantial lead in public opinion polls and that faced a sharply divided opposition. Even in the absence of hard evidence for a direct link between campaign length and incumbency success,[53] the government likely realized that any lead it held would be harder to overcome in a compressed campaign period.[54]

The main opposition parties were no doubt also aware of this Liberal advantage, though they merely alluded to it in the House.[55] With the Liberals still leading in the polls and an election imminent, the worry was that hasty implementation would indeed give the governing party an advantage.[56] This is the chief reason why the opposition parties ultimately voted against the legislation. Indeed, the government used time allocation to end debate and expedite passage, ignoring opposition protests that there had been insufficient consultation and that there was no "real reason" to rush the process. There were also the obligatory and predictable add-on complaints, such as that the bill did not go far enough in the context of what were regarded as other areas in need of consideration. The Reform Party wanted additional deliberation on the subject of having fixed elections and the establishment of recall procedures, and also urged debate on removing the subsidies and tax concessions to political parties.[57]

From the other direction, the Bloc Québécois pushed for a stricter election finance regime, specifically one that mimicked Quebec's more regulated approach. That said, the opposition protest was driven mostly by the timing of the process and its hurried implementation of the new registration approach. As has already been pointed out, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as a whole had been supportive of the idea of change from the very outset, and throughout the legislative proceedings the two main opposition parties continued to signal their fundamental agreement with the principles of establishing a permanent list and a shorter campaign.[58] Reform MPs on the committee

and in the House were openly enthusiastic about the possible cost reductions that would be realized from the changeover (and, to a lesser extent, content that a source of minor patronage would be removed for the dominant Liberals), while, for its part, the Bloc continued to take its lead from developments in Quebec, where the provincial government was in the process of establishing its own voters register. Mention might be made as well that opposition members, as incumbent politicians contemplating their own personal re-election campaigns, likely also regarded a shorter campaign as an attractive feature.

In short, the fact that Reform and the Bloc ultimately voted against Bill C-63 does not contradict the essential portrayal that the major political forces were lined up on the same side. Moreover, in retrospect, given their political outlooks, it is not at all surprising that there was support for the permanent list on the benches opposite the government. This is, of course, one of the implications of what was the most prominent feature of the political era, the collapse of the traditional party system, characterized by devastating losses by the New Democratic Party and, especially, the Progressive Conservative Party, and their replacement by Reform and the Bloc. The two older parties were virtually invisible in the debate, as they were in Parliament generally, and, of course, lacking status as "recognized parties," had no representation on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The executive, the Liberal Party and the two main opposition parties were clearly neither invisible nor irrelevant as part of the defining political environment that ultimately produced the National Register. Obviously, their support, and particularly the backing by the government, were essential ingredients, and it is significant that these forces were all arrayed on the same side as the process unfolded. However, their impact, even if convergent in nature, was subsequent to the initiative demonstrated by Elections Canada and the engineering efforts that agency made to develop and sell the case for change. The early steps that Elections Canada took, already documented, are especially relevant for appreciating its prior impact with reference to these political forces. Reinforcing this interpretation of causal sequencing is the virtual absence of any evidence suggesting that these political actors, all of whom fared well in the 1993 election, had signalled any pre-existing preferences for a change in the registration system. Especially important in this regard is the lack of any mention of registration reform in the Liberals' famous "Red Book," which set out campaign pledges in numerous areas.[59] Another timing-sensitive point is apparent when one recalls that the agency established its all-important steering committee with the mandate, again, "to act as a coordinating body, within Elections Canada, with respect to communicating and encouraging the development of A Continuous Register of Electors" on October 20, 1993, that is, even before the 1993 election campaign had drawn to a close.

In sum, the argument here is that both government and opposition responded positively to Elections Canada's initiative because the change was politically and economically favourable and because it was in the interests, both partisan and otherwise, of the main parties to go along. No doubt, much of what was pitched to the elected officials and their advisers by Elections Canada reflected its appreciation of which arguments, explicitly made or perhaps merely implied, would be most effective. In this sense, the organization not only capitalized on amenable circumstances as it took up the cause of a register, but actively championed it as well.

Number of Options on the Table: One

John Courtney makes the simple, though important, point that the process of change became easier in the absence of debate on what might replace enumeration. Consensus among those seeking change that the only acceptable alternative was some form of "open" permanent list no doubt helped concentrate opposition to enumeration in favour of a register. A broader take on Courtney's observation might be that this consensus effectively ended up precluding the option of reforming enumeration. As it was, the reflection and discussion that surrounded registration reform tended to be narrowly focused. A more encompassing consideration might have done more to stress the relative strengths of enumeration and to include an analysis of the possibility of reforming the canvassing-based process to meet what were regarded as its limitations. Such a stance would not have been completely at odds with the conclusions of the Lortie Commission, which did, of course, offer important recommendations for improving the enumeration system, even as it favoured the move to a (provincially based) register.

However, the weight of the recommendations was undermined not only by the RCERPF's advocacy of a permanent list, but also by the limited analysis that it had conducted as it drew critical conclusions about the functioning of the enumeration method. This is the case that Courtney and Smith make in their RCERPF-sponsored background publication.[60] While admitting

that the shortage of qualified enumerators had been a problem, they state that it was not a particularly new difficulty, that there was no hard evidence that it had increased in magnitude and that it was in any event a circumscribed matter involving some, but hardly all, urban polls. Courtney and Smith also wonder if enumeration problems, especially overlooked voters, could indeed all be linked to the failure to find sufficiently qualified enumerators. Importantly, they point out that 85 percent of the returning officers were new in 1988 and that their inexperience could easily have resulted in the inadequate training of enumerators. In addition, they observe that the pressure to begin the campaign quickly was "another practical constraint on efficiency that is quite separate from the quality of personnel" (p. 363). They also list other factors, such as inadequate pay, as explanations for the shortfall in qualified enumerators.

Courtney and Smith also raise questions about the evidence justifying a move toward a shorter campaign. While the commission was no doubt impressed by the large number of interveners who identified a shorter campaign as one advantage of a permanent list, it is unclear whether this sentiment spread much beyond the context of its proceedings. The two authors admit that although there had been some concern about campaign length in the recent past (and that presumably this is what led to the reduction from 60 to 50 days), their sense of the matter is that it continued to be a fairly minor preoccupation. After reviewing statutory reports, newspaper commentaries and Elections Canada's publication *Contact*, they conclude: "In a list of problems and shortcomings of Canada's voter registration system, the length of the campaign to which enumeration contributes, must be ranked low" (p. 371).

It would appear, then, that the RCERPF's limited research into the problems of enumeration is one of the specific ways in which the commission contributed to the ascendancy of the permanent-list idea, which Elections Canada benefited from as it began to sponsor a federally controlled permanent list. The absence of a comprehensive assessment, one that included research-based solutions to the problems of enumeration, made it easier for the agency to take those difficulties (and the supposed benefits of a shorter campaign) as its launching point. It then had only to demonstrate that the substitution of a permanent list would resolve those problems. Of course, the fact that the agency's research agenda did not itself include any analysis of a revamped enumeration process is even more indicative of a very early preference for a complete overhaul. Note as well that Elections Canada's general strategy of selling the idea of a register served the same purpose – to keep all other options off the table.

Participation and Participation Inequality: Limited Attention

Elections Canada's research agenda was, unfortunately, also circumscribed in another important way: relatively little concrete consideration was given to the impact of a permanent-list approach on electoral participation, including equality of participation. To be sure, there was a formal commitment to the idea that any new system would need to work to facilitate the vote. Indeed, appearing before the Senate as it considered Bill C-63, Kingsley articulated six principles that had guided thinking about the development and maintenance of the register, pointing out that the RCERPF's own deliberations had been framed in these same principles. The first three centred on the need to ensure that the state would continue to assume primary responsibility for registration, that potential voters would be given postwrit opportunities to register and that the new system would function as effectively as the enumeration system – meaning that levels of coverage and accuracy would be equivalent to those achieved through enumeration. The remaining guidelines centred on concerns about privacy, confidentiality and the right not to participate in the process.[61]

These principles are comparable, though not identical, to the orienting standards that were spelled out in *The Register of Electors Project*.[62] The first three of these similarly identified state initiative and voter access as guiding principles. The fourth pledged to respect electors' privacy and the confidentiality of their personal information. A fifth posited the need to locate reliable data sources, in order both to minimize the costs of developing and maintaining the register and to avoid "any further imposition on Canadians in gathering personal information." Finally, there was a commitment to investigate the matter of sharing the register's data with other jurisdictions.

The main point is that nowhere in that key report was there any note of concern about the possible negative effects on voter participation that might ensue from the implementation of a permanent list. Short of a population register that would serve as the basis for a voters register or a system of mandatory registration, neither of which was seriously considered (and understandably so), the permanent-list method as envisaged

could never match the effectiveness of the state-initiated enumeration approach in facilitating regististration. It is true, of course, that once they are inscribed in the National Register, voting would be a relatively easy matter for the overwhelming majority of Canadians who do not move between electoral events. Nevertheless, for the many who do change addresses, particularly if they move out of their original constituency (see below), some action would be required to correct their registration information. The newly eligible, especially those turning 18, would need to do even more to register in the first instance. Without denying that with the new regime in place Elections Canada has made it as easy as possible for individuals to become properly registered, and as well granting that, from an objective perspective, the amount of effort required to do so is quite minimal, the reality nevertheless remains that individuals still need to exercise some initiative. And, again, everything that is known about the facilitation and inhibition of participation would anticipate a drop in participation as these demands, modest as they may be, are placed on the prospective voter. Given the circumstances and the demographics involved, the negative effect is likely to be accentuated among those who frequently move, such as renters and poorer persons, as well as among those entering the electorate. Many such individuals are already less prone to vote, which is why there have long been disparities in turnout across social categories. A registration regime that demands some action on the part of such individuals may very well run the risk of creating even larger gaps. Unfortunately, such concerns about diminished participation and participation equality, arguably the main disadvantages associated with the new system, were largely ignored in the extensive research and discussion that framed the understanding and arguments about the impact of a regime change.[51]

But what of the fact that matching the "effectiveness" of enumeration was set out as one of the criteria that the new system had to meet in order to be considered acceptable? In particular, *The Register of Electors Project* claimed that its background studies had shown that a new permanent-list approach, drawing upon a variety of sources to establish the register and keep it reasonably up to date, and, furthermore, incorporating an enhanced revision process, could in the final analysis equal the coverage and accuracy levels realized through enumeration. Does this not, then, constitute relevant research about matching the data quality of the old system, and thus respond to criticism that participation was not a priority? One obvious problem with such a rebuttal is that a larger array of revision opportunities is just that – opportunities – and individuals would still need to take advantage of them. In other words, it is precisely the rebalancing of the registration exercise toward a heavier emphasis on revision that is at the heart of the new system. Therefore, to demonstrate that compensating opportunities could be put in place, without, at the same time, an analysis of how easy or difficult it would be for citizens, particularly specific categories of them, to avail themselves of the opportunities constitutes a very incomplete form of analysis.

The notion that the research into data quality might be taken as evidence of a concern about participation is also weakened by the low threshold that Elections Canada set for itself as it defined what the agency needed to achieve in order to meet the pledge of matching enumeration's coverage and accuracy. This point merits some unpacking. *The Register of Electors Project* claims that the research showed that "a register could be maintained between electoral events at a targeted reliability level of 80%, the level necessary to begin conducting an electoral event, by importing electronic data from existing sources" (p. 5). This percentage represents all eligible voters expected to be listed at their correct address as the register generates the preliminary lists. Importantly, it is "based on the 1993 experience of successfully conducting an election using an unmaintained one-year-old list that had declined to an average of 80% level of reliability" (pp. 25–26). This benchmark, then, has its origins in the reuse of the 1992 list one year later, without modification – that is, without additions or purgings – and in the knowledge that 20 percent of the electorate is affected by demographic changes over the course of a given year (16 percent address changes, 2 percent new 18-year-olds, 1 percent new citizens, and 1 percent deaths). The intent, of course, was to have revision and election day registration provide the opportunities for the needed corrections and additions.

There are two points to make regarding the 80-percent reliability figure. First, it was perhaps given more credence than might be warranted simply because the 1993 election with which it was associated was deemed by Elections Canada to have been "successfully conducted." Without challenging that summary characterization – establishing the overall success of an election, from an administrative perspective, is surely a complex undertaking – the attribution still required detailed substantiation. It would be insufficient to merely state that an unprecedented number of people registered during

the revision period and on voting day; indeed, it would be strange had this not occurred given that an outdated list was used in most of the country and election-day registration was a new arrangement. An analysis that explored how easy or difficult individuals found it to register, how many did not do so because of registration problems and the like, would have provided the basis for a more convincing claim about success. Second, and more importantly, 80 percent is the target for a list unmaintained over a one-year period. However, Elections Canada had from the outset committed itself to a strategy whereby the list would be updated regularly, certainly multiple times within any given 12-month interval. Thus meeting the target of 80 percent amounted to a lesser challenge. Still, Elections Canada has not exceeded that comparatively modest goal by a large margin. Estimates of the data quality of the National Register since June 1998 have generally ranged from 80 to 83 percent.[64]

Part 2: The Impact on Participation

In evaluating the consequences associated with the change in registration method, the greatest emphasis is placed here on the electoral involvement of Canadians. Such a focus is in keeping with the tradition in Canada of considering the facilitation of voter participation as the primary objective of a registration regime. As was noted above, however, Elections Canada ended up paying less attention to participation concerns than it ought to have done as it developed the case for the adoption of a register. This raises the question of whether or not its limited focus on participation has resulted in any negative outcomes.

The fact that voter turnout in Canada has dropped so precipitously in the last few elections is another reason why an emphasis on participation is warranted. Up until the 1988 contest, voter turnout over the postwar period averaged around 75 percent and while this figure is low relative to turnout in most other long-established democracies, Canadian turnout did not drift noticeably upwards or downwards over the period.[65] A dramatically new pattern, however, has been established over the course of the last three elections. Participation, as officially recorded (votes cast as a percentage of registered voters), dropped to 69.6 percent for the 1993 election, underwent another decline to 67.0 percent for the 1997 contest and then plummeted to 61.2 percent for the 2000 election. The last figure was the subject of much commentary, not only because it helped confirm the negative trend since 1988, but also because it established a new record for the worst turnout ever documented in a federal election, eclipsing the record low of 63 percent set in 1896. Not surprisingly, the drop in electoral participation has been regarded as being serious enough to prompt a fair amount of soul-searching as to its meaning for the nature and legitimacy of Canadian democracy.[66] Chief Electoral Officer Kingsley appears to have had this in mind when he mused aloud about the possible wisdom of instituting compulsory voting in Canada.[67]

There has also been a considerable amount of scholarship vested in understanding why more and more Canadians are voting less and less.[68] While a variety of factors have been identified as contributing to lower turnout levels, much of the analysis has focused on generational effects, particularly the influx into the electorate of young voters who are less interested in and less knowledgeable about politics than their predecessors, and noticeably less inclined to participate than their similarly aged counterparts of earlier generations.[69] This phenomenon is also a source of participation inequality, insofar as turnout disparities have increased across age categories.

What bearing might the changeover in registration regimes have had on the lower levels of participation observed in recent elections? Has it had some impact, even of a secondary kind, on the post-1988 decline in voter turnout? The suggestion has, in fact, already been made that the move to a register can be ruled out as an explanation for the drop in turnout observed in the last three elections, simply because the decline began well before the new system came fully into effect with the 2000 election.[70] This idea finds additional support in the observation that voter turnout has declined in many other countries as well, so perhaps the Canadian experience is simply part of a broader trend.[71]

Still, such a line of argumentation does not by itself foreclose the possibility that the National Register of Electors played a role in lowering turnout in the 2000 election; it could be that turnout would have been higher were it not for the operation of the new registration process. Moreover, if this is true then it is conceivable that the change in registration regimes contributed, however modestly, to the decline in electoral participation at least across the 1997 and 2000 pairing of elections.

A case could even be made that the move to a permanent list is relevant for understanding some of the

broader post-1988 decline. After all, the 1993 election was conducted, outside of Quebec, on the basis of a registration process that had some of the hallmarks of a permanent-list approach.[12] The reuse of the year-old 1992 list meant a correspondingly heavy reliance on revision and polling-day registration to handle subsequent changes and additions, which might have resulted in lower participation because of the greater effort involved in registering. As for the 1997 election, it was, of course, preceded by the last enumeration held before the formal adoption of the National Register. However, as discussed below, that particular canvassing effort did not conform exactly to standard or ideal practices, which leaves some room for doubt about its interpretation vis-à-vis the facilitation of voting.

As will be seen, the extent to which the implications of the change in registration regimes can be linked to broader patterns of turnout decline (in addition to whatever impact it may have had in the specific 2000 election) depends, in part, on the approach taken to characterize the dependent variable. Two sorts of measures are available to gauge the registration-participation relationship: the standard turnout measure defined by votes cast as a percentage of registered voters, and eligibility measures. The latter allow for investigation of the variability in the "coverage" of the registration process as it has a bearing on the overall turnout rate. With registration as a necessary condition for voting, turnout is naturally decreased as large numbers of adult citizens are excluded from the lists. Put differently, eligibility measures, by benchmarking the number of votes cast relative to the number of eligible citizens, index voter turnout while taking into account the operation of the registration regime.

Official Turnout in 1984–2000

The utility of the turnout measure defined by votes cast as a percentage of registered voters stems from its status as the official measure, as published by Elections Canada, for documenting voter turnout in the country and, of course, from its long-time use by students of Canadian elections. Its pertinence here, however, arises from its value as an index of participation when the focus is on how easy or difficult it is for those *already* registered to follow through and cast their vote.

In this regard, it is pertinent to recall the near-truism that the level of participation is inversely related to the amount of effort required to carry out the activity in question. This leads to the expectation that a smaller proportion of those registered under a permanent-list method will vote compared to the traditional postwrit enumeration system. This follows simply because the compilation of the voters list afresh and in close proximity to the election translates into situations where individuals are more likely to be listed at their current address and to have received the subsequent information they require in order to cast their ballot; put differently, the timeliness of the postwrit enumeration process implies fewer listing errors and other problems requiring action. In contrast, permanent lists (at least those based on a volunteer system) cannot match this level of currency, because they cannot track and instantaneously record Canada's high level of population mobility; consequently, the register's preliminary list will contain a large number of individuals listed at outdated addresses.

The need for remedial action, or lack thereof, on the part of electors is not the only way of understanding how registration effects may influence participation. Under the traditional system, personal contact with enumerators on the doorstep may very well have acted as a stimulus enhancing the probability that individuals vote beyond their existing predispositions to do so. Under the new regime, it seems unlikely that receipt of a card, even one that contains the correct information, will in itself make much of a difference. A more certain case can be made for contacting in connection with the canvassing efforts of parties and candidates. In their study of the 2000 election, Blais *et al.* determined that, all things being equal, "the likelihood of voting increased by five percentage points when someone had been contacted by a political party."[13] However, electors who are improperly recorded on the register are unlikely to be mobilized by the parties; they risk being missed during the course of the campaign because the parties rely heavily on the preliminary lists.[14]

That said, it is somewhat problematic to draw inferences about registration effects for the entire period in question on the basis of the official voter turnout measure. (As will be seen, the specific 2000 election lends itself to a more certain investigation of the link between registration circumstances and turnout.) The fluctuations in voter participation across the elections in question are influenced by so many factors, including generational replacement, that it is nearly impossible to attribute specific effects to the registration circumstances in which individuals found themselves. The challenge of drawing inferences is compounded, ironically enough, by the errors of inclusion that attend the permanent-list approach, mainly because of the delay in purging names

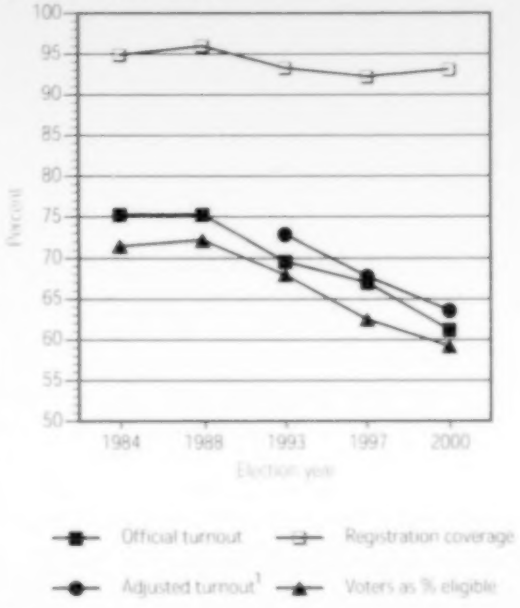
(those individuals who are no longer part of the electorate because they have emigrated or passed away) and in correcting duplicate listings (those individuals who have reregistered following a move but are listed at their former address as well as their current one). These inaccuracies make it difficult to sort out how much the declining turnout figures reflect the problems faced by registered electors as they sought to participate and how much is due to the existence of "impossible voters" picked up in the denominator of the turnout measure.[15]

However, one registration-based effect can be discerned in connection with the standard measure: the surplus names and redundant listings have created the appearance of a lower level of participation than actually prevailed. The artificially deflated turnout figures that result are not a particularly attractive by-product of the permanent-list method, as Canada's lower-than-average turnout rates hardly need to be exaggerated.

This inflationary effect is demonstrated in Figure 1 by showing the turnout rates for the last five elections as officially reported and as adjusted, drawing upon existing information and research that provide the basis for estimating (and thus subtracting) extra names and listings. It is quite apparent that the adjusted figures do transform the pattern of decline over time. Information is not available, it should be noted, to modify the official turnout figure of 75.3 percent for the two postwrit enumeration elections in 1984 and 1988. This is unfortunate because, even though in those elections the registration process was done from scratch and in close proximity to the election, there were no doubt some errors of inclusion – such as students being redundantly registered by their parents in their home constituency. That said, the number of errors would have been far less compared to what transpired in connection with list-based elections.

For the 1993 election, the official turnout rate is 69.6 percent and the corrected figure is 72.9 percent, which is the average of two near-equal estimates of similar magnitude, one (72.7 percent) derived from Elections Canada's reckoning of the number of duplicates and deceased on the final voters list,[16] the other (73.1 percent) taken from an independent analysis carried out by Blais *et al.*[17] The reworked percentage suggests a more modest impression of the magnitude of turnout decline between 1988 and 1993; indeed the new figure is not far from the 75 percent benchmark and is well within the range of variation around that norm. The drop in participation really began in earnest with the 1997 election. The adjusted figure for

Figure 1
Turnout and Registration Coverage in Federal Elections, 1984-2000



Notes
[1] Surplus names and duplicate listings removed from the total number of individuals registered (1993, 1997 and 2000 elections only).
Source: Official turnout figures taken from reports of the chief electoral officer. Other figures taken either directly or calculated from Elections Canada, Statistics Canada, IDEA and other sources.

that contest, using Elections Canada's estimates of surpluses,[18] is 67.8 percent, which represents a quite substantial five-point drop from 1993. This compares with a decline of only 2.6 percent based on the official, unadjusted tallies. The fact that the corrected figure lies within a percentage point of the unadjusted one (67.0 percent) reflects the fact that the 1997 election, based largely on a canvassing effort within two months of voting day, had fewer errors of inclusion.

The drop in turnout associated with the 2000 election would also appear to be "real." The official turnout rate plunged to 61.2 percent, a decline of almost six points (5.8 percent), while the adjusted figure of 63.6 percent (again calculated using Elections Canada information)[19] still represents a substantial four-point drop (4.2 percent). Nonetheless, the difference between the official and reworked figures – about two and a half points – is far from trivial and rivals in magnitude the adjustment made for the 1993 election. The recalculated figure itself takes into account an estimated 614,000 duplicates on the final list of voters and 177,000 individuals who had passed away since being inscribed on the National Register.

The other comment to make about the adjusted figure for 2000 is that its acceptance would remove that election from the record books as having the lowest turnout ever, allowing the 1896 contest to once again claim that dubious honour. Still, no amount of adjustment can alter the fundamental fact that voter decline in recent elections is real and deserves the attention it has received as a prominent feature of contemporary political behaviour in Canada.

Coverage and Eligibility in 1984–2000

Typically, the number of individuals who meet the statutory age requirement is taken to denote the pool of eligible voters. In traditional immigrant-receiving societies, however, it is advisable to use citizenship as well as age to circumscribe the eligible population. Two versions of such measures are relevant here, a more important one that allows for direct measurement of the coverage achieved by the registration method by dividing the number inscribed by the number eligible, and a second, derivative measure that relates votes cast to the potential number of eligible voters.

In both cases, the same orthodoxy specifying an inverse relationship between the requirement of individual initiative and participation also anticipates less coverage (and less voting) in the new system relative to the traditional one. The state's more decidedly proactive approach in the past meant that eligible voters had to do little to get their names on the voters list. Moreover, the fact that the compilation of names was carried out in close proximity to election day meant that new 18-year-olds and new citizens were more likely to be included. By contrast, those not already on the permanent list would need to take some action, however minimal, to be included on the electoral rolls. Furthermore, being unregistered, these individuals are also more likely to be overlooked in the campaigning efforts of parties and candidates.

The adjusted registration data can be retained as the analysis shifts to consider what conclusions might be reached about coverage (and thus participation) differences over the same 1984–2000 period.[40] Of prime interest is the comparative performance of the enumeration and list systems in capturing the optimal number of eligible voters. The information needed to estimate the eligible population in terms of age and citizenship comes mainly from Elections Canada and Statistics Canada. Because these population figures are estimates,[41] as are the adjusted registration statistics for the last three elections, coverage rates are best considered in broad juxtaposition with one another rather than as precise point estimates. Of course, the fact that elections in the 1984–2000 period were carried out based on either enumeration or permanent-list principles allows for the comparison of coverage rates using the two methods. The enumeration elections of 1984 and 1988 were followed by reuse of the 1992 referendum voters list for the 1993 election (again, outside Quebec), by an enumeration process for the 1997 election and finally by a full application of the National Register in 2000.

The top graph line in Figure 1 indicates that coverage did decrease over the last three elections but not in a pattern that suggests that the decline is strictly associated with list-based methods.[42] Coverage dropped nearly three percentage points after the 1988 election and, importantly, did not rise with the enumeration-based contest in 1997. For 1984 and 1988, the registration effort is estimated to have reached 94.9 percent and 96 percent, respectively, of the eligible population. Inclusion decreased to 93.3 percent for the 1993 election, dropped further to 92.2 percent in 1997 and then rose slightly to 93.1 percent in 2000.

Taking these statistics at face value, the interpretation must be that coverage declined noticeably in the last three elections and that neither registration method was able to match previous levels. There is, moreover, a plausible basis for such a conclusion, and it involves two characterizations. One would be that the permanent lists performed as expected and ended up capturing fewer individuals than the enumeration method had been able to do in 1984 and 1988. The second would involve acknowledging that the employment of enumeration in the more contemporary period can no longer equal its past achievements. This latter conclusion, of course, would square with the argument of diminishing quality and coverage that had been put forward as a reason for abandoning enumeration. Indeed, in his official report on the 1997 election,[43] the chief electoral officer pointed out that there were challenges in getting the political parties to supply a sufficient number of names for enumerators and that returning officers had, as a consequence, to turn to other sources. No exact figures are cited, though the report does go on to specify that there were problems finding enough enumerators in the west end of Toronto and in Newfoundland (p. 45).

Without wishing to dispute the reality of this shortage as a factor, it remains unclear whether enumeration problems, per se, were solely or even largely responsible for the relatively lower coverage level recorded in the 1997 election. Other factors – not necessarily associated with the application of the enumeration method

– could have been equally or more important. In this regard, it is significant to note that elsewhere, Kingsley's report on the 1997 general election calls attention to the "intense activity" that the agency entered into within the tight time frame they had following the passage of Bill C-63: "While revising manuals and forms to reflect the latest amendments to the Act, we also had to provide the necessary training for returning officers and their key staff in preparation for the last enumeration" (p. 42). More importantly, the report goes on to note that, because of redistribution, three-quarters of the 271 returning officers who were to oversee the final enumeration were new appointees and, moreover, that their selection had been a slow process:

> Because of the delays in the appointment process, despite the training efforts of Elections Canada, many returning officers did not have time to assimilate the many manuals and procedural guidelines for their tasks before they plunged into an enumeration and election. (p. 42)

Insofar as these time pressures might have had a bearing on the quality of the registration effort – and common sense suggests that they must have had, at some level – then attributing the low coverage in 1997 to a shortage of enumerators (and other enumerator-elector contact problems) is not such a straightforward matter.

There are additional grounds for questioning whether the coverage rate in that election can be taken as a valid indicator of a generally diminished capacity on the part of the enumeration method. One piece of evidence, interestingly enough, comes from the 1993 election. In that year, Elections Canada regarded the enumeration drive that had been carried out in Quebec – an effort that arguably more closely conformed to standard enumeration practices – as a great success. Indeed, in its report the agency boasts that it managed to reach *98 percent of Quebec's eligible population*.[84] It gives no information on how that figure was derived or how this high level of coverage was achieved,[85] but such a figure by itself more than suggests that enumeration could still, in the early 1990s, be carried out quite effectively.

The registration process bound up with the last enumeration featured not only tight time frames, riding redistribution and the slow appointment of returning officers; at least two other elements involving deviations from normal enumeration practice may have contributed to the decreased coverage. First, in two provinces – Prince Edward Island and Alberta – there were no enumerations; instead, Elections Canada purchased the final lists of registered voters that had been generated for the preceding provincial elections, held in April 1996 and March 1997, respectively. Given the numbers of eligible voters involved, the use of Alberta's list is particularly troubling. Not only was that list several months old by the time the election took place (in June), but it was a product of the province's register-based system, which, in turn, had been based on a November 1996 general enumeration. Thus, the purchased list was susceptible to error, and to the extent that there was a substantial number of errors of exclusion (presumably, as a function of Alberta's rapid population growth), this could have been a source of the lower coverage. Second, the enumeration process carried out in the rest of the country took place slightly earlier than usual, leaving room for further slippage. Instead of taking place between 35 and 29 days before the election (as had been the case in Quebec for the 1993 election), the final April enumeration was carried out between 53 and 47 days ahead of voting day. While this change extended the lag time by a mere two and one-half weeks, it would have resulted in some individuals being missed. To be sure, each of these deviations by itself would be expected to play only a minor role in explaining the lower overall coverage, but together their cumulative impact could be significant in a context where additional factors were at play.

If these facts suggest that adequate coverage is still possible with enumeration, Elections Canada might, in rebuttal, point to the evidence of enumeration-like problems with the 2000 election in the context of its "targeted revision" efforts. Targeted revision is a process by which a pair of agents call on residents in specifically designated areas during the second week of the election period. "In general, they concentrated on recently developed areas such as new subdivisions, areas known for high mobility, including clusters of apartment buildings and student residents, and institutions such as nursing homes and chronic care hospitals."[86] This process, which is very much akin to enumeration, is, of course, intended to compensate for the limitations in coverage and currency associated with maintained lists. Altogether, about 515,000 additional addresses were targeted in this manner. "The targeted revision exercise provided effective coverage of high-mobility areas," concluded the report on the 2000 election.[87] In making the point about coverage problems with enumeration, however, Elections Canada could have emphasized that 29 percent of the addresses called upon failed to produce a response at

the doorstep, even after two visits (at which time a mail-in package was left). Later, when asked about the possibility of a return to the traditional system, Kingsley did use this statistic to illustrate the problematic nature of enumeration.[88] In rebuttal, it could be pointed out that, given the areas that were designated, a 71-percent rate of contact is actually quite impressive and, moreover, a subset of those who were not at home or did not answer their door ended up registering by taking advantage of the mail-in package that had been left. Indeed, the statistic might even be taken to suggest the value of a three-visit canvass (at appropriately altered times) for certain special areas, with the routine two-visit mode used elsewhere. Clearly, the other point to make is that coverage in the 2000 election would have been lower without targeted revision.

In short, there is reason to believe that the use of list-based approaches contributed, however modestly, to the recent decline in electoral coverage (and participation). Key to this interpretation is seeing the 1997 election as constituting only a weak test of the coverage achieved with enumeration. Still, a more prudent perspective at this juncture would be to see this only as a plausible inference. A more certain one is that coverage under the new regime has been inferior to what enumeration was able to achieve in the past. Therefore, the commitment on the part of the advocates of a permanent-list approach to maintain the high levels of inclusion that had long characterized Canadian registration practice has not yet been fulfilled.

Turnout and Eligibility

Finally, and for the sake of completeness, Figure 1 shows the overall participation rate by relating the number of votes cast to the number of eligible voters. Since this measure captures both registration coverage and voting behaviour, it is to be expected that it records the lowest percentages across all elections. And, of course, it also picks up both the declining coverage that has occurred as well as the fact that fewer Canadians have been voting. In the 1984 and 1988 elections, 71.5 and 72.2 percent of the eligible population voted, while in 1993 only 68 percent did so; the figure falls off sharply to 62.5 percent for the 1997 contest and drops again, to 59.2 percent, in 2000. However it is measured, participation in Canadian federal elections has clearly been declining.

The 2000 Election

The evidence is much clearer on the impact – a negative one, to be exact – of the new registration process on voter turnout in the 2000 election. That contest is of prime importance, of course, because it was the first one to be held with the new regime well in place. The National Register had been functioning for nearly three and a half years when it was used to generate the preliminary voters lists. Now, therefore, its performance as an open-list system, based on the incorporation of a continuous flow of updated elector information, can be meaningfully assessed. A focus on that contest does require, however, stepping back somewhat from making strong distinctions in the analysis of participation effects according to whether or not an individual was registered. This is because a large number of people were in "in between" situations, such as having their name listed, but at an old or incorrect address. Apart from these "incorrect" registrations, factors such as receipt of a voter information card and manner of receipt would have made a difference. Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate that the less than ideal registration circumstances in which many individuals found themselves – including, most fundamentally, not being registered at all when the preliminary voters lists were generated – had an inhibiting effect on participation.

A variety of information sources allow for this conclusion. To begin with, there was ample media coverage of the campaign that focused heavily on the administrative aspects of the election, including various concerns about the nature and functioning of the new registration system. There were also reactions by MPs, particularly members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, as they had an opportunity to conduct a post-mortem on the election by questioning Kingsley directly. As well, Elections Canada carried out its own "post-event" analysis of the voter registration process in addition to other aspects of the election.[89] Its summary report, in turn, draws upon survey-based information taken from, among other individuals and organizations, 60 randomly selected candidates who ran for registered parties, 20 selected "representatives of registered political parties,"[90] 259 returning officers and 49 academics who had signalled their interest in electoral matters. The report also cites some (summary) results of national surveys, including one conducted by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of Elections Canada. As will be seen, that data set is used extensively as a basis for an independent analysis of the registration process and its impact. While the statistical work provides the most convincing, and certainly the most generalizable, evidence on registration effects, the disparate sources of information essentially converge in producing a characterization of the new system as having operated in such a way as to have inhibited voter turnout.

Media Commentary

There is nothing surprising or new about the fact that the media chose to focus heavily on the problems surrounding the registration and voting processes and did not dwell so much on those aspects that worked well. Certainly, past elections governed by the enumeration method were not immune to critical reports that emphasized voters being missed in the canvassing effort, being given the wrong information about where to vote or confronting long queues in the polling stations. Still, the heavy and persistent media scrutiny of the difficulties and irregularities in the 2000 election is quite striking. The following excerpts from a sampling of different newspapers are fairly representative of the tone of newspaper coverage right across the country:

> Electors receiving their voter registration cards should avoid the temptation to toss them into a heap of unread mail. Many local residents are noticing their cards list them as voters in the wrong riding, despite the fact they may have lived in the same place for decades. *Fredericton Daily Gleaner* (November 9)

> Glitches in the country's computerized list of federal electors are angering voters in various parts of the city. And their situations mirror similar problems across the country as the National Register of Electors makes its debut in this federal election. Some voters, particularly those in new housing developments, are not on the list at all, others have received faulty voter cards and still others have seen their cards go astray to old addresses. *Hamilton Spectator* (November 15)

> The new system has created chaos in some constituencies, with angry voters objecting that they have received Elections Canada cards with wrong information, that they haven't received cards or that they got more than one. *Edmonton Journal* (November 21)

> There were widespread reports of futile attempts by voters to register on the list for the first time, as well as reports of wrong addresses for voters and even incidents where deceased citizens were still on the list. *Vancouver Sun* (November 24)

> Voting across the country was marred by glitches yesterday as polling stations opened up to four hours late and one in 10 Canadians arrived ready to cast their ballots only to find their names were not on the official voters list. *National Post* (November 28)

One of the specific themes taken up in the print media, but picked up as well by the broadcast media, was the confusing nature of Elections Canada's television advertisements informing the public that they had to be listed in the National Register in order to vote. Clearly, the agency wanted as many people as possible to register during the revision period in order to avoid logjams on polling day, when it would still be possible to register. The exact wording of the message was, "If you're not on the voters' list, you can't vote. No, you can't." What transpired, of course, was that many individuals who did not receive a voter information card concluded (wrongly) that they would be unable to vote. Similarly, some of those who received a card bearing the name of another person (e.g., the previous occupant of their dwelling) reached the same determination.

Parliamentary Scrutiny

The advertising campaign received even more intense criticism from members of Parliament on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, who had their first postelection opportunity to quiz the chief electoral officer and his staff formally on March 1, 2001. Kingsley, who indicated that he had personally approved the advertisement, at first defended it, but yielded – "Okay, what we're going to do is revise the ad."[91] – after persistent challenges by one parliamentarian. That MP, John Reynolds of the Canadian Alliance, who was also the lead-off questioner, began on a broader note by quoting from Elections Canada's performance report for 1999–2000, including positive developments with regard to the National Register, but then went on to say:

> Now, it all sounds great, but at one other meeting before you got here, we heard that just about every member on this committee has had a problem. As the whip of the party, I have a bunch of notes from members who have real problems...I had lots of complaints...from constituents, in that they just weren't on the list.[92]

No doubt Reynolds' annoyance was compounded by the fact that his own name had been erroneously left off the list.

Michel Guimond of the Bloc Québécois began by signalling his sense that there were some general problems with the way in which the election had been conducted, promised more queries at a second meeting and went on to ask about Elections Canada's updating arrangements with Quebec. Still, he did feel the need to make a general comment on the register: "On page 9 of your document, Mr. Kingsley, you stated that, 'The register met our expectations for the most part.' I beg to differ slightly."[93]

Libby Davis of the NDP was the next opposition MP to speak, and she was unequivocal in her condemnation:

> I find it ironic that the information we've had presented today – these graphs and slides and so on that make the national registry look like a success story, even though there are some problems – is vastly different from the experience we actually had on the ground. I consider all of

> us, as MPs, as the real experts in this matter...Within our own caucus, I know the first thing we talked about when we got back here was what happened on election day. Everybody had incredible stories of concerns and situations that took place.[94]

She went on to cite the specific problem of "discrimination against poor people and aboriginal people," making it clear that, to her way of thinking, not only did the permanent-list method depress turnout in general but it had an especially debilitating effect on less favoured groups.

The theme of participation inequality was sounded even earlier in the hearings by a Liberal MP, Carolyn Parrish, who first of all wondered if she needed to change her position as a supporter of the register:

> As a great advocate of a national registry, I have lived to eat my words. We had a rough time in this election. We also had a rough time with the national registry in the 1999 [Ontario] provincial election. I don't expect perfection, and I think it'll probably take several elections to get this thing ironed out and cleaned up, so I'm not going to throw the baby out with bathwater quite yet.[95]

Her worry that the new registration method had a negative effect on turnout and equality were practically the next words out of her mouth:

> I'm more concerned about the voter turnout than I am about anything else. I think the voter turnout was poor. A low voter turnout disenfranchises the poorest and most disenfranchised people in society to start with. I think it was really good for the blue-haired ladies who have lived in my riding for 60 years, because they were on the voters list, they had property, nobody hassled them, and they were fine. The teenagers didn't get to vote, nor did new immigrants, people who had moved recently, or the poor. Generally, society doesn't give a damn about those people, but I do — even if they vote NDP.[96]

While it is unclear how much of this criticism Kingsley expected to hear, he cannot have been surprised by the concerns voiced about the particular situation of young people. In preliminary remarks to the committee, his top official responsible for the National Register, Rennie Molnar, readily identified this gap in coverage as an area in need of significant improvement. Molnar allowed that only an estimated 30 percent of eligible youths had been registered when the lists were first generated (with a final registered level of 55 to 60 percent).[97] Kingsley himself had been quoted several times during the campaign as lamenting the fact that a huge majority of the estimated 400,000 Canadians who had turned 18 during the year had not registered in spite of Elections Canada's outreach program; after all, all they had to do, he emphasized, was to sign a "confirmation of information" form and mail it back to the agency.[98] To summarize, there is no disagreement that the permanent list came up short with regard to registering newly age-eligible voters.[99]

Elections Canada's Post-Mortem

The agency's own assessment, drawn from the elite sources already mentioned, does not hide the difficulties experienced with the new registration regime. Its *2000 General Election Post-event Overview* notes that "a majority of candidates and political party representatives indicated a low degree of satisfaction" with the preliminary lists of voters generated by the National Register (p. 7) and that for their part returning officers reported having "to deal with widespread or major complaints about the preliminary lists of electors, indicating that the accuracy of the lists did not meet their expectations" (p. 7). Academics were described as seeing no difficulty with the registration procedures, though some "indicated that the process unduly put the onus on electors and required too much initiative from them, especially those who were less involved or interested in the first place" (p. 7). Candidates and political parties apparently were "neutral about most aspects of voter registration," but when opinions were given "they generally reported low satisfaction rates, particularly with registration at advance polls and on polling day, with the targeted revision process and with the accuracy of revised lists of electors" (p. 8).

The Ipsos-Reid Survey[100]

Central to the use of survey data for deriving insights into the link between registration and participation is the single item that was employed to categorize the registration status and circumstances of respondents. The question, structured around people's experiences with the voter information card, merits quoting in full:

> Prior to the November 27th, 2000 Election you should have received a "voter information card." This card is approximately 5 inches by 9 inches and would have provided you with information about the election, including where and when to vote. It also would have had your name and address and told you that you were on the voters list. Which of the following most closely describes your situation?" [READ, ACCEPT ONE RESPONSE]

The response possibilities were as follows (followed by the percentage distribution):[101]

> Your voter information card came in the mail and was correctly addressed to you personally (75.3)
>
> Your voter information card came in the mail, but there was some personal information that was incorrect (4.5)
>
> You got a voter information card with someone else's name (2.2)

You never got a voter information card (14.5)

You had to make some sort of enquiry (for example, a phone call or e-mail) to get your own voter information card (3.0)

Taken at face value, the responses would appear to support Elections Canada's estimates of the "data quality" of the register. Among the respondents, 75.3 percent indicated that they had received the card with correct information. Presumably, one could add to this figure the 4.5 percent who had received a properly addressed card (or at least correct enough to receive it) even though the card contained some inaccuracies about the elector's personal information. The resulting total of 79.8 percent is not too far removed from the sort of figures that the agency had been generating as estimates of the percentage of individuals listed at the correct address.

At the same time, the survey figures are probably too generous to be taken as corroboration for those data quality estimates. As with most election surveys, the sample probably overrepresented the more interested and informed individuals among the citizenry. This is strongly suggested by the very high turnout level of 81 percent reported by the survey respondents, a figure that is a far cry from the actual level of participation. No doubt this inflation is partly the product of nonvoters falsely reporting having voted, but it could be partly the result of politically engaged and motivated individuals (those likely to be registered and to vote) being disproportionately represented in the sample.

Nonetheless, the survey still managed to capture a significant number of Canadians who were in less than ideal registration situations and who would have needed to undertake some remedial action in order to vote. Among these, the largest category (14.5 percent) comprised people who reported not having received a card at all; presumably these were primarily individuals who were simply not recorded on the National Register. A further 2.2 percent indicated that they had received someone else's card; likely these were mostly individuals who had moved into a dwelling unit previously inhabited by a person who was registered. The ordinary expectation is that remedying these various registration situations would require different levels of engagement and effort. The anticipation is that those with only incorrect personal information would need to take the least action, while those who had received someone else's card would need to make somewhat more of an effort and those who had received no card at all would have to take the most steps to get on the list.[102]

As will be seen below, there is support for characterizing these registration situations in this way, but it is also clear that the response categories are not perfectly homogeneous; it seems that the response alternatives could have been constructed with greater precision. No doubt most of those who did not receive a card were indeed not registered, but a small subset of those listed might have simply failed to receive their card because of address errors. As well, some of those registered might have moved into a dwelling whose previous occupant had not been listed. Similarly, the circumstances of those who received a card addressed to someone else could have varied, some having been already registered at their old address, others not. Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that some individuals did not move at all but received another person's card simply because it was incorrectly addressed. The category comprising those who took the initiative to obtain their voter information card poses another problem from a methodological point of view. In particular, it conflates not being registered – including, presumably, not having received a card – with the taking of subsequent action. This makes the category distinctive because none of the others has purposefully captured the *motivation* to register. (Subsequent analysis will show that this does indeed make the category stand apart somewhat.) Incidentally, insofar as some of these individuals did not receive a card then this suggests that the nonrecipient level might be higher than 14.5 percent. Finally, judging from media reports, a small subset of those who received a card with incorrect personal information may have been given wrong information about where to vote.

Still, it appears that this ordering of registration statuses, if not ideal, does tap the various situations in which people found themselves, at least in a rudimentary way. Table 1 helps to demonstrate this by displaying how some registration situations are, as expected, more likely to be bound up with certain age and income categories. One premise is that younger and poorer Canadians are more likely to have had suboptimal registration experiences, largely because they are more likely to be renters or to change residences frequently. As anticipated, age exhibits the sharpest pattern with registration status. Among those between the ages of 18 and 24, only one in every two individuals (48.9 percent) received a correctly addressed card with accurate information, and among those between 25 and 34 years old, only two of three (66 percent) had this ideal registration experience. The percentage continues to rise for the next

two age brackets, reaching 82.7 percent for those between 35 and 64 and 91.5 percent for those 65 and over. Most of these differences are mirrored in the corresponding percentages associated with the most unfavourable situation, not having received a card. Over one-third (34.5 percent) of the youngest adults and almost one-fifth (19.7 percent) of those in the next age bracket claimed that this was their experience. By contrast, only 10.2 and 3.3 percent of those between the ages of 35 and 64 and those 65 and over, respectively, did not receive a card.[103] Apart from this, younger Canadians were also modestly more likely to take the initiative to register, capturing, it would appear, that comparatively small and exceptional segment of young people with the motivation and interest to participate.

The pattern for income is also as expected, again suggesting that the registration status categories are measuring at least basic differences. Those with an income of less than $20,000 had the least favourable experiences. Among these individuals – the poorest Canadians – 66.7 percent found themselves correctly registered, while 22.6 percent responded that they had failed to receive a card. Registration circumstances are slightly better for those with incomes between $20,000 and $39,999, at 73 and 15.4 percent, respectively. Those in the two higher income brackets were also better off with regard to registration, with the corresponding percentages hovering around 80 percent for being correctly registered and 12 percent for failing to receive a card. Finally, and in part overlapping with the above data, part-time and full-time students were also prone to be in registration situations where some remedial measures were necessary. Only 50.0 percent of students found themselves in the ideal registration situation, while 31.2 percent received no card (specific data not shown).[104]

The survey offers additional perspectives on the various registration experiences of Canadians in the last election. An important insight is available from a line of questioning that asked individuals who did not receive a card with the correct information and address whether or not they took any action to rectify their registration status. Those who responded in the affirmative were queried about whether they thought the process was easy or difficult. The data indicate that a substantial proportion of people either failed to act or regarded the process as difficult when they did try to do so. Altogether, nearly one-third (30.9 percent) of those who received a card with incorrect personal information, someone else's card or no card at all did nothing to adjust the irregularity. A further 15.7 percent of these individuals took action but reported that they found the process difficult or very difficult. In other words, nearly one-half of the individuals (46.6 percent) in less than optimal registration circumstances either failed to follow through as hoped for or, if they did, found the process wanting.[105] Table 2 breaks down this figure for the various registration categories: 41.4 percent for those who had only personal information to amend, 44.4 percent for those who received another person's card and 51.8 percent for those who received no card. Roughly, then, inaction and perception of difficulty increased according to the amount of remedial action required. This helps substantiate the value of distinguishing among the categories, imperfect as they are. The data also reveal that there were undesirable registration results even when relatively little remedial action was required.

Table 2 presents results for three other variables that illuminate further aspects of Canadians' reaction to the

Table 1
Voter Registration Status by Age, Income (percent)

	Age				Income			
Registration status	18–24	25–34	35–64	65+	Less than $20,000	$20,000-39,999	$40,000-59,999	$60,000+
Correctly registered	48.9	66.0	82.7	91.5	66.7	73.0	79.0	79.5
Personal information incorrect	5.8	5.8	3.8	3.6	3.5	5.9	5.4	3.3
Received another's card	2.2	5.2	1.3	1.2	3.8	2.8	1.3	1.8
Received no card	34.5	19.7	10.2	3.3	22.6	15.4	11.6	12.7
Took initiative to get card	8.6	3.3	2.0	0.3	3.5	2.8	2.8	2.7
(N)	(362)	(483)	(1,280)	(329)	(372)	(597)	(542)	(738)

Source: Based on data provided by Elections Canada from a random telephone survey of 2,500 Canadians conducted by Ipsos-Reid between November 28 and December 11. While the survey oversampled individuals between the ages of 18 and 34, the weighted version is used here. According to Ipsos Reid, it is "representative of Canada's age and gender composition in accordance with 1996 Census data."

new regime. All respondents were asked to rate, on a 0-to-10 agree-disagree scale, the flow of information on "how to get on the voters list and about where and when to vote." The results are presented in two ways, with mean scores for the original 11-point measure and percentages for the agree, neutral and disagree (collapsed) portions of the scale. The first item shown asked whether the information on registering and voting was "clear and easy to understand." For the sample as a whole, the response was quite favourable, with more than 8 in 10 people (82.9 percent) agreeing that this was indeed the case (*Mean* = 8.0). Given what was widely reported about the confusing nature of the "Are you on the list" advertising campaign, this perhaps suggests that many Canadians did not, in fact, find it to be confusing (or, at least not consciously so). However, as noted below, there were differences across the various registration situations. On the second item, respondents were less likely to agree that there was "enough information." Only 62.9 percent agreed that they had received sufficient information, while 30.4 percent disagreed (*Mean* = 6.6), suggesting that Elections Canada might have done more in this area. The lowest ratings occur in connection with the third item, which recorded sentiment about motivation, in particular, whether the registration and voter information "encouraged me to vote." Less than half the sample (45.4 percent) replied in the affirmative, while a substantial 37.3 percent indicated disagreement (*Mean* = 5.2). Although it might be argued that some part of this response reflects the low-stimulus (e.g., noncompetitive) nature of the election itself, the question does after all refer to administrative rather than political aspects of the election over which the agency had some control.

The breakdowns shown suggest, not surprisingly that registration status made a considerable difference in individuals' assessment of the information flow. In general, the more the registration circumstances deviated from the ideal, the lower the likelihood of respondents rating the information as clear and understandable, of sufficient quantity and as having encouraged them to vote. Thus, while 88.5 percent of those who received an entirely accurate card and 85.6 percent of those

Table 2
Correction Process and Attitudes Towards Registration and Voting Information, by Registration Status (percent)

		Registration status				
	All	Correctly registered	Personal info. incorrect	Received another's card	Received no card	Took initiative to get card
(a) Took no action or found correction process difficult/very difficult	46.6	--	41.4	44.4	51.8	--
(N)	(528)		(111)	(54)	(363)	
(b) Registration and voting information						
Clear and easy to understand						
Agree	82.9	88.5	85.6	77.8	53.6	82.7
Neutral	6.0	5.1	4.5	9.3	11.1	4.0
Disagree	11.1	6.4	9.9	13.0	35.3	13.3
Mean	8.0	8.5	8.2	7.6	5.6	7.7
Enough information						
Agree	62.9	66.4	64.0	63.0	44.4	59.5
Neutral	6.7	5.5	9.9	7.4	11.4	9.5
Disagree	30.4	28.0	26.1	29.6	44.2	31.1
Mean	6.6	6.9	6.8	6.2	5.0	6.3
Encouraged vote						
Agree	45.4	48.8	46.8	31.5	28.7	50.7
Neutral	17.3	17.7	20.7	25.9	13.5	15.1
Disagree	37.3	33.5	32.4	42.6	57.7	34.2
Mean	5.2	5.5	5.2	4.6	3.6	5.2
(N)[1]	(2,456-76)	(1,849-68)	(111)	(54)	(351-60)	(73-75)

Notes:
[1] Sample numbers vary because the number of respondents for these questions varied.
Source: See table 1.

who received a card with incorrect personal data agreed that the information was clear and understandable, the figure diminishes somewhat (to 77.8 percent) for those who received someone else's card and tumbles dramatically to 53.6 percent for those who received no card at all (*Mean* = 8.5, 8.2, 7.6 and 5.6, respectively). Clearly, the positive assessment of the quality of the information, seen in connection with the entire sample, does not hold across the board, especially for those who did not get a card. These same individuals were also less likely to respond that they had received "enough information" – only 44.4 percent provided positive replies compared to 63 to 66 percent for individuals in other registration circumstances. Assessments of whether the information encouraged participation also form a pattern, with both receiving someone else's card and not receiving a card apparently making a difference. Of those who received a completely correct card, 48.8 percent indicated that they were encouraged to vote as a result; this is true of only 31.5 percent for those who received another's card and only 28.7 percent for those who received no card at all (*Mean* = 5.5, 4.6 and 3.6, respectively).

In short, these figures reveal that the flow of registration and voter information was regarded as particularly inadequate by those who were most in need of more and clearer guidance, and perhaps stimulation. No doubt, some of the responses could be the result of rationalizing by individuals who were predisposed not to vote and therefore downplayed or did not recall the information they had come across; still, there is no reason to assume that such a phenomenon overwhelms all other interpretations. And, of course, at a basic level it makes sense that individuals who did not receive a card would, naturally, be those most likely to indicate limited informational effects.

What of the counterclaim that these results speak not so much to the principles of the new regime as to the particulars of how the information campaign was conceived and put into place? No doubt, this is true to some extent and future campaigns will likely be designed, recalling Kingsley's pledge, to reflect some progress on the learning curve. Still, it is not entirely inappropriate to view the inadequacies as being inherent elements of the new regime. From the very beginning, after all, the plan to develop and implement a permanent-list system called for a huge effort to be made during the election period to pick up the slack, to capture the very large numbers expected who would not be listed or would be listed incorrectly. In other words, the decision to develop a register automatically raised the stakes and demanded that the greatest priority be given to facilitating the registration of the millions of unlisted or incorrectly listed Canadians. Without effective communication with this population, it is hard to fathom how their participation could be facilitated.

The Impact on Participation

The most important aspect of the new registry system to explore is, of course, its direct impact on voting in the November 2000 election, and not only in connection with turnout in general but as well the implications that it had for participation inequality across social categories. With regard to the broader dimension, the pertinent question is not so much whether higher registration thresholds led to less voting, since the expectation of some sort of a negative effect is well grounded in the literature. Additionally, there is the plain but important fact that a substantial number of survey respondents reported that they did not regularize their registration circumstances, and thus many of them would not have been able to vote. What is really at issue, then, is the magnitude of the impact on voter turnout associated with less than optimal registration experiences.

It would appear that registration status indeed exerted a strong influence on voter turnout. Table 3 provides an initial sense of this by setting out the voter participation rates for individuals in the different registration circumstances. Putting aside the category of those who took the initiative to get registered (90.7 percent of whom voted), the effects are conspicuously monotonic. For respondents in the most favourable registration situation – those who received a card with correct information – 88.3 percent ended up voting. Turnout fell, but only modestly, to 82.9 percent, for those who received a card with some incorrect personal information. However, the decline is noticeably greater, down to 72.2 percent, for those who received a card addressed to someone else. Finally, the lowest participation level and the biggest drop across categories occur in connection with those who received no card at all, with barely half, or 51.2 percent, indicating that they had cast a ballot. This represents a huge gap between the two extreme registration situations.

Closer inspection of the data, involving a multivariate orientation, strengthens the inference that registration status had a direct and substantial bearing on lower levels of voter turnout in 2000. A follow-up on the bivariate perspective is necessary to ensure that the results reported above are not masking other effects.

including the possibility that they are merely picking up the typical nonvoting habits of certain social groups, particularly the young and the poor (who were, to begin with, also less likely to be properly registered or registered at all). While it can be argued that logistic regression is the more appropriate multivariate technique to employ in light of the nominal dependent variable (voted/not voted), results are shown based on OLS regression techniques because the coefficients generated for the independent variables have a more conventional interpretation (they gauge the increment or decrement in the dependent variable for a unit change in the independent variable in question, net of the other variables included). That said, parallel logistic analyses were carried out for confirmation purposes, and revealed essentially the same effects.[106] The first cut through the data assembled virtually all of the demographic variables available in the survey that could potentially exert some influence on voter turnout. The list included age, income, education, employment/student status, gender, province/region of residence, mother tongue, Aboriginal origin and nativity (whether Canadian- or foreign-born). These background characteristics were incorporated as (0/1) dummy variables, as were the primary items measuring registration status: "personal information incorrect," "received another's card," "received no card" and "took initiative to get card," leaving those correctly registered as the reference category.

Only the demographic variables representing the effects of age, education, income and Aboriginal origin proved to be statistically significant and were retained for subsequent, pared down, treatment. The results of this parsimonious approach are shown in Table 4 in three forms or models, the first serving as a baseline by capturing the effects of the demographic variables alone, the second assessing the additional influence of the registration experience measures and the third adding potentially relevant attitudinal variables. As the variables examined in the first two regression runs are all binary, the regression coefficients record the turnout level of the category in question relative to the level of the omitted category. Thus, the coefficient -.31 for those 18 to 24 years of age records a participation gap of 31 points compared to those 65 and over. By itself, that result reiterates the widely documented fact that Canada's youngest adults (i.e., newer "generations") vote at much lower levels. Also as expected is the overall pattern for the set of age variables, which reveals a narrowing voting deficit as age increases. As well, these initial results confirm both income and education as having a bearing on turnout (those who are less well off and less educated vote at lower levels than their more privileged counterparts), though the impact is less than the effect associated with age. The regression coefficient of -.17 for Aboriginal people indicates less participation on their part relative to other Canadians, even after taking age and socioeconomic status into account. Altogether, this small collection of variables explains about 11 percent of the variation in turnout in the sample as indicated by the (adjusted) R^2 statistic of .106.

Table 3
Voter Turnout by Registration Status

Registration status	% voting	(N)
Correctly registered	88.3	(1,883)
Personal information incorrect	82.9	(111)
Received another's card	72.2	(54)
Received no card	51.2	(363)
Took initiative to get card	90.7	(75)

Source: See table 1.

The level of explanation rises somewhat, to .169, when the variables tapping registration status are incorporated for the second step, signifying that they make an additional contribution in accounting for who does and does not vote. More to the point, the inference attributing an inhibiting effect to registration is sustained in this phase of the multivariate analysis. Clearly, some registration experiences do have a bearing on participation independently of age, education and income (and Aboriginal origin), and, moreover, the most important ones have negative consequences. The largest such effect is associated with not receiving a card, which is clearly indicated by the (statistically significant) regression coefficient of -.28; relative to those who were correctly registered, this registration condition amounts to a substantial 28-point deficit in turnout. For its part, receiving a card addressed to another person translated into a turnout decline of 13 points, also a fairly sizeable impact. There was evidently no effect for those who received cards with only incorrect personal information (-.02). Finally, there was a small positive effect for those who took the initiative to get registered, reinforcing the view that these individuals are distinguished by their motivation.

Factoring in registration also leads to an adjustment of the effects of certain other variables. Note in particular that the coefficient for the lowest age category decreases to -.23 (from -.31), implying that unfavourable registra-

Table 4
Regression Models of Voter Turnout[1]

	Model 1 Baseline: demographic effects		Model 2 Including registration status		Model 3 Including attitudinal variables	
Age						
18–24	-.31	(.030/.000)	-.23	(.030/.000)	-.10	(.027/.000)
25–34	-.23	(.029/.000)	-.18	(.028/.000)	-.06	(.025/.011)
35–64	-.09	(.025/.002)	-.06	(.025/.017)	-.01	(.022/.779)
Income						
< $20,000	-.07	(.026/.005)	-.05	(.025/.035)	-.01	(.022/.684)
$20,000–39,999	-.06	(.021/.006)	-.05	(.021/.009)	-.01	(.018/.758)
$40,000–59,999	.01	(.021/.535)	.01	(.020/.674)	.02	(.018/.185)
Education						
< High school	-.11	(.029/.000)	-.10	(.028/.000)	-.03	(.025/.279)
High school	-.11	(.023/.000)	-.11	(.022/.000)	-.06	(.020/.003)
Some college/university	-.06	(.020/.005)	-.06	(.019/.003)	-.04	(.017/.014)
Aboriginal	-.17	(.041/.000)	-.14	(.039/.000)	-.13	(.035/.000)
Registration status						
Personal information incorrect			-.02	(.036/.534)	-.03	(.032/.333)
Received another's card			-.13	(.050/.012)	-.07	(.044/.101)
Received no card			-.28	(.022/.000)	-.18	(.020/.000)
Took initiative to get card			.08	(.045/.078)	.04	(.040/.306)
Attitudes						
Election interest					.07	(.008/.000)
Knowledge: parties					.04	(.010/.000)
Knowledge: voting process					.08	(.010/.000)
Vote matters					.01	(.002/.000)
Important to vote					.05	(.004/.000)
Constant	1.05		1.05		-.06	
Adj. R	.106		.169		.357	
N = 2,218						

Notes
[1] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Figures in parentheses are standard errors and statistical significance levels.
Source: See table 1.

tion circumstances were partly responsible for the group's lesser participation, though, of course, a substantial effect associated with that age group persists. Interestingly, the consequences stemming from not receiving a card would appear to be just as detrimental for turnout, if not more so, as being between 18 and 24 years of age.[107] The inference, then, is not only that registration matters, but that it matters a great deal.

This conclusion holds in the face of a third regression model, also shown in Table 4, which adds some available attitudinal variables that are typically considered in more comprehensive treatments of turnout. These include a measure of election interest, two knowledge items (one on party platforms and policies, the other on the voting process), one indicator of citizen duty and one tapping vote efficacy.[108] One rationale for including these items is to consider them as tapping the propensity of individuals to be politically engaged, including making the effort to register and vote. Indeed, insofar as they are conceptualized as antecedent variables, then one might wonder whether the primary registration-vote relationships seen so far merely reflect underlying differences in political predisposition.[109]

Not surprisingly, each of these variables has a statistically significant impact on turnout and collectively they ratchet up the level of explanation by a noticeable amount, more than doubling the R^2 to .357. Moreover, most of the coefficients for the previous sets of variables are attenuated with the incorporation of these attitudinal items, implying that they play a part in explaining how the demographic and registration variables have an effect. The biggest drops actually occur for age, with the coefficients for the youngest and next youngest categories weakening from -.23 to -.10 and from -.18 to -.06, respectively, suggesting that lesser

levels of interest, knowledge and the like are intervening variables that help interpret the lower voting rate among individuals in these two age groups. For its part, the coefficient associated with not receiving a card is diminished, from -.28 to -.18 (and from -.13 to -.07 for those receiving someone else's card), indicating that the attitudinal variables do have a bearing on the registration-vote relationship. Still, registration status continues to exhibit a direct and reasonably sizeable effect on turnout. Moreover, the results pertaining to knowledge of the voting process are also helpful in supporting the inference that registration is consequential. As a measure of understanding the administrative side of voting, it has a significant impact on turnout itself; and even when this is taken into account, registration status continues to have relevance. In short, *experience* with registration is important.

The Impact on Participation Inequality[110]

Not only do these results substantiate the argument that the new permanent-list system, in its first full manifestation in the 2000 election, had a debilitating impact on voter turnout, but they also necessarily mean that the negative effects worked to increase participation inequality. One reason why younger people and the poor were less likely to vote in that election was that they found themselves in more challenging registration circumstances; simply, they were disproportionately in categories where a greater degree of effort was needed in order to participate. Additionally, and as noted earlier, because they were less likely to be included on the preliminary list or to be recorded properly at their current address, they were less likely to be stimulated to vote through the canvassing efforts of parties and candidates. By comparison, older and more affluent individuals tended to be in more amenable registration (and contact) situations. Since participation disparities already exist across these social categories, in part driven by differences in interest and information, the registration system served to magnify the traditional discrepancies in turnout.

The registration process may also have worked to increase the inequalities further, even beyond these situational aspects. It is possible, indeed plausible, that the new regime's inhibiting impact on turnout was not uniform across socioeconomic categories but, rather, exerted a stronger influence in some cases than in others. Such an "interaction effect" is to be expected for younger and poorer individuals because they are less likely to vote to begin with. Generally less motivated and informed than other members of society, they are more susceptible to the operation of contextual effects that make political activity easier or, as in the present case, harder to undertake. Perhaps, as well, this predisposition not to be engaged politically makes the mobilization efforts of the parties all the more critical for their participation; put differently, not being contacted may represent a larger opportunity cost for the young and the less affluent than for other potential voters. In short, the new registration process may well have had a double effect: not only did it put young people and poorer individuals in certain constraining registration situations, it may have risked enhancing the *consequences* of that placement.

Table 5 sets out some evidence that suggests this additional inhibiting effect did indeed occur in the 2000 election. Shown are turnout percentages related to registration status, on the one hand, and age and income, on the other. With the registration categories ordered from the least to the most amenable situations, the joint effect of registration and each of the

Table 5
Turnout by Registration Status and by Age and Income (percent)[1]

	Age				Income			
Registration status	18–24	25–34	35–64	65+	Less than $20,000	$20,000–39,999	$40,000–59,999	$60,000+
Received no card	32.0	49.5	69.7	(63.6)	38.6	42.4	65.1	63.8
Received another's card	(62.5)	64.0	87.5	(75.0)	64.3	81.2	(57.1)	76.9
Personal information incorrect	66.7	85.7	95.8	66.7	61.5	74.3	89.7	95.8
Correctly registered	75.3	80.0	90.5	96.3	84.2	83.9	89.7	91.3

Notes
[1] Figures in parentheses indicate an *N* of less than 12.
Source: See table 1.

other variables can be readily seen. In the case of age, the turnout rate is extraordinarily low, at 32 percent, for those between 18 to 24 years of age who did not receive a card, but soars to 96.3 percent for those 65 and over who were correctly registered. As a whole, the essentially nonadditive pattern in the data is hard to miss. The disparity in turnout between being correctly registered and not receiving a card amounts to 43.3 percent (75.3 vs. 32 percent) among the youngest group. The gap drops to 30.5 percent among those between 25 and 34 and to 20.8 percent for those between 35 and 64. Interestingly, it actually goes back up to 32.7 percent among those 65 and over; it is unclear whether this is a function of the limited number of cases in some of the cells or if it indicates that older individuals were also susceptible to the impact of registration constraints. Still, the main message from the table with respect to age, and to a lesser extent income, is that the pattern accords with the interpretation put forward that the negative registration effects were stronger for the young and the poor relative to other Canadians.[11]

Conclusion

This investigation into the change in Canada's voter registration regime has been structured by two objectives. One entailed explaining why the traditional postwrit enumeration approach was replaced by a permanent-list system. The significance of the registration method as an integral component of the electoral process, and the need to document and understand new developments in its character and operation, provided a rationale for pursuing this aim; the fact that the canvassing approach in particular had been abandoned added further justification. After all, enumeration had been long-established in the country, had come to define a uniquely Canadian institution and, moreover, ended up being replaced fairly rapidly even though its merits and the overall desirability of keeping the system had been officially reaffirmed as late as 1986. In broad terms, the task of assembling an explanation involved identifying the forces and circumstances, political and otherwise, that pushed in the direction of change. Since most factors worked to support replacing enumeration, in retrospect the outcome was predictable; the subject was nonetheless seen as worthy of study – in order to describe the process of change, emphasize some key points and establish some of the significant linkages among the various contributing causes. At another level of analysis, this paper set out and defended a perspective that privileges the role of Elections Canada and the chief electoral officer as key and proactive elements that deserve most of the credit for the advent of a register. The agency not only took advantage of opportunities within an evolving context of electoral reform to seize the initiative in advocating on behalf of a register, but it then greatly facilitated its adoption by employing an effective selling strategy that stressed the technical and economic feasibility of a permanent list that appealed to the interests of both the government and the main opposition parties.

One point that was emphasized in the account of the changeover was the relatively limited attention that had been devoted to considering the possible consequences for participation, including participation disparities. The exploration of these areas formed the basis of the second objective pursued here. What gave added weight to this focus, of course, is the anxiety that has been building about the decline in voter turnout in the country. By and large, the evidence indicates that the new registration approach has contributed to this decline and has accentuated participation gaps across social groups. Evidence of these negative effects is strongest and most certain in the 2000 election, where the National Register had its first full test. Both qualitative and quantitative information was marshalled to demonstrate that a large number of Canadians ended up in less than ideal registration circumstances, which, in turn, served to decrease their likelihood of voting. The impact was particularly heightened for those who did not receive a voter information card, a situation that disproportionately worked to constrain the voter turnout of younger and poorer citizens. The results also suggest that the registration process increased participation inequality beyond these situational aspects.

These results potentially provide the basis for some rethinking about the change in registration regimes, even for contemplating a return to enumeration in order to recapture its advantages in facilitating participation. Such a reversal, however, is clearly not in the cards. Even if concerns have been raised by some MPs and in the media about registration in the 2000 election, such voices have not generated anywhere near the momentum necessary to bring about the status quo ante. More to the point, the same dominant forces and amenable circumstances that converged to bring about

the register in the first instance still prevail. Claims about costs and federal-provincial co-operation, the attraction of incumbency advantage and the ongoing commitment to technological change, among other factors, continue to characterize the discourse on the merits of the new regime. Moreover, with the passage of time, the investment and commitment, material and otherwise, that have gone into producing and maintaining the National Register have entrenched it as a central element in the electoral process. The other political reality that mitigates against the possibility of switching back to enumeration is the simple fact that those most affected by the inhibiting effects of the register have the least political clout. The fact that the debate on registration, to the extent that there has been a debate, has been confined to elite circles and has not at all penetrated public consciousness has also served to solidify the permanent-list approach.

Interestingly, there is some evidence suggesting that a wider debate, had it occurred, might have led to at least some reservations about a new regime. Two questions on voter registration were posed as part of a national public opinion survey sponsored by the Institute for Research on Public Policy and carried out in the first half of 2000.[6] The second question is more pertinent but it may be useful to note the first one as well; it asked:

> In the past, the voters list was prepared by having enumerators go door-to-door before every election. In order to save money, we now use a list that is updated regularly using government records like income tax forms. Do you think we should go back to using the door-to-door list, or continue to use the government list, or do you not have an opinion on this?

Slightly more than one in two respondents (56.7 percent) indicated a preference for continuing with the list, while only 19.3 percent suggested a return to enumeration. At the same time, it is unclear how much can be read into these responses as an endorsement of the register. Considering that practical experience with a permanent list would not come until the election later that year, it is likely that much of this opinion was "soft"; some people indicating a preference for the new system might have responded unreflectively, being more swayed by the cost-savings reference in the question than anything else. The fact that nearly a quarter of the respondents (23.9 percent) offered no opinion also suggests uncertainty or tentativeness. One wonders what the distribution might have looked like had this question been put to a similar sample just after the November 2000 election. Such curiosity surrounds the second question as well. It was designed to probe which of two principles, economics or participation, should inform the registration approach:

> What do you think is more important, that the voters list be prepared as inexpensively as possible or that every effort is made to include everyone, even if it costs significantly more, or do you not have an opinion on this?

Here, too, a substantial number of respondents, in fact, 30.6 percent, responded that they had no opinion, suggesting a lack of engagement with the issue, though some of these individuals might have had difficulty choosing strictly between the two ideals. Those who did voice a preference were divided about the principle that should prevail but, interestingly, more thought that inclusion (39.6 percent) as opposed to costs (29.7 percent) should be the defining principle guiding the registration process. Rather than make too much of this 10-point difference, perhaps it suffices to note simply that this result at least suggests that Elections Canada will need to do more to meet the desire of many Canadians for greater equality in electoral participation.

Among the factors inhibiting a return to the old registration regime, Elections Canada's unwavering enthusiasm for "its" register probably ranks at the top. At the same time, the agency has not been indifferent to the kinds of concerns voiced in some circles. Indeed, it cannot be. Obviously, it must provide some kind of response, at the very least, to MPs who have spoken out and continue to express reservations about the register's debilitating effects on participation. More importantly, the agency can be expected to take its job seriously and improve the effectiveness of the National Register, and that includes maximizing coverage and accuracy. Ironically enough, with the register firmly in place, the agency can perhaps now afford to pay more attention to participation-linked matters that originally were given little regard.

The chief electoral officer's appearance before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on May 7, 2002, provided him an opportunity to discuss the kinds of steps that Elections Canada had recently taken or was contemplating to improve the operation of the register. To begin with, Kingsley pointed out that an agreement had been reached with the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency to alter tax forms in order to allow individuals who give their permission and confirm their Canadian citizenship to be added directly to the National Register. This option

was actually put in place in time for the spring 2002 tax period. While it applies to all eligible voters, the expectation is that it will register mainly young people, especially new 18-year-olds. According to Elections Canada, of the 275,000 people expected to be added to the voters lists through this ticking of boxes, some 225,000 will be young people. Other endeavours have entailed devising communications strategies to make more effective contact with young people in order to encourage their registration. Plans were also afoot, Kingsley indicated, to research coverage, and undercoverage, of key demographic groups such as low-income individuals, using the newly available 2001 census data.

Kingsley also indicated that a review of "address and geography components of the registry" had been launched by returning officers "to ensure that street and place names are spelled correctly in those few places where there are still problems and that electors are in the correct electoral district and polling division."[10] And testing was apparently continuing with regard to the tracking of address changes using Canada Post information and in connection with online registration.

The chief electoral officer used his appearance before the Standing Committee to remind MPs of proposals (requiring legislative changes) that he had set out earlier, in the context of his recommendations following the 2000 general election.[11] One modification recommended in his report, *Modernizing the Electoral Process*, was to make it easier for voters who move from one constituency to another to phone in their corrections, an option that is currently limited to those who move within a constituency (p. 19). (At the same time, enhanced networking among computers would allow officials to remove a listing at a person's former address, thus reducing duplicate listings.) A more general recommendation would make it easier for individuals who take the initiative to register (outside of the election period) by eliminating the need for them to sign a certificate of eligibility (pp. 13–15). Another proposal, if implemented, would enhance the ability of the chief electoral officer "to undertake initiatives to verify, correct and update the Register and to authorize returning officers and others, to conduct such initiatives outside of the electoral events" (p. 16).

No doubt, these measures have the potential to make some difference, though the nature and magnitude of the effects are an open question at this juncture. Some new measures, such as the option of using the telephone to register in a new constituency, would be helpful to individuals with enough interest and initiative to take advantage of them. It is unclear how much the easier option will serve those who lack that interest and initiative. And, as well, not all young people file an income tax return, which is also true of many poorer Canadians. The effectiveness of identifying areas of undercoverage, especially in low-income locales, would be important but, of course, matters will depend on the thoroughness of the subsequent action taken. Presumably, the intention is to take proactive measures along the lines of targeted revision, which, it will be recalled, entails limited but focused enumeration-like actions carried out during the election period.

What is interesting to note in this regard is that the chief electoral officer's last recommendation quoted above would provide the basis for canvassing measures between election events as well as during revision. Presumably, it would even allow for the possibility of a complete enumeration in off-election years, which would bring the Canadian approach more in line with the Australian model, whereby biennial door-to-door canvassing is used to update the voter register. Closer to home, British Columbia has mandatory enumeration during the third calendar year following an election, and the five other provinces that recently adopted their own registers officially allow for enumeration as well. In the absence of any possibility of turning back the clock, the incorporation of enumeration-like activities in order to balance the registration approach would appear to be the best way to address the coverage inadequacies that seem almost inherent in the current system.[12] Planned and unhurried periodic nationwide canvassing outside of election periods, in conjunction with a substantially expanded use of targeted revision during the election period, would serve to add hundreds of thousands of Canadians to the voters list. Such state-promoted initiatives would have the additional benefit of establishing direct contact with eligible voters, constituting, to quote Courtney and Smith again, "a personal reminder by the community of the positive value that it places on electoral participation by its citizens."[13]

The supplementary use of enumeration measures would naturally add to the cost of registering voters. But this is the trade-off that must accompany any kind of serious commitment to facilitating participation. For the longest time, ensuring unfettered access to the vote was the dominant principle governing the employment of the registration method in Canada. This commitment to access wound up receiving rela-

tively little consideration during the process that culminated in the establishment of the National Register. With very little systematic thought given to what might be lost in terms of participation, the financial savings were accorded more weight than was warranted. It now appears that the time is right to revisit the matter, and to ensure that the discussion and the policy choices reflect the ideal that registration regimes should primarily operate to uphold the key democratic principle of facilitating the participation of all citizens.

Notes

This paper benefited greatly from the enormous assistance provided by Elections Canada. Many important facets of the analysis, including those that critically examine the agency's role in the development of the National Register of Electors and the permanent list's impact on turnout, would not have been possible without Elections Canada's active co-operation; this included the provision of in-house documents, statistical information and survey material as well as discussions with key personnel. This paper also benefited from the reflections and suggestions of André Blais, Paul Howe, Richard Johnston and an anonymous referee, and from the research assistance of Chris Anderson.

1 For a brief discussion (with references) of the different objectives and principles associated with alternative registration regimes, see Jerome H. Black, "The National Register of Electors: Raising Questions About the New Approach to Voter Registration in Canada," *Policy Matters* 1, no. 10 (December 2000).

2 Histories of voter registration at the federal level in Canada are provided by Norman Ward, *The Canadian House of Commons*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), ch. 10; J. Patrick Boyer, *Election Law in Canada: The Law and Procedure of Federal, Provincial and Territorial Elections*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: Butterworths, 1987), pp. 416-424; and John C. Courtney and David E. Smith, "Registering Voters: Canada in a Comparative Context," in Michael Cassidy (ed.), *Democratic Rights and Electoral Reform in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991), pp. 346-358. Provincial and territorial variations are also considered by Boyer, *Election Law in Canada*, pp. 424-425, 452-527, and Courtney and Smith, "Registering Voters," pp. 372-389. A fairly up-to-date listing of the legal provisions governing voter registration at both levels of government is set out in Elections Canada's *Compendium of Election Administration in Canada: A Comparative Overview* (Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2002), part D.

3 One key generalization that can be made about registration systems is that their impact on accessibility for voters very much depends upon whether voters need to take the initiative in order to be registered. See, for instance, Valentine Herman and Françoise Mendel, *Parliaments of the World: A Compendium* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 40; and William C. Kimberling, "A Rational Approach to Evaluating Alternative Voter Registration Systems and Procedures," in John C. Courtney (ed.), *Registering Voters: Comparative Perspectives. Report of a Round Table on Voter Registration* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1991), pp. 3-11. Illustrative of this fact is the notoriously low registration numbers in most American states, where individuals must assume the major responsibility for registering; see G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (March 1986), pp. 17-43. The broader argument and demonstration of how the prevailing institutional features and procedures can alternatively facilitate or inhibit voter turnout is well established in the literature; see, for instance, Robert W. Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in Industrial Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 4 (December 1987), pp. 405-423; and Robert W. Jackman and Ross A. Miller, "Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies During the 1980s," *Comparative Political Studies* 27, no. 4 (January 1995), pp. 467-492.

4 Courtney and Smith, "Registering Voters," for instance, report a coverage figure of 95.99 percent for the 1988 election; the estimate was generated by Elections Canada for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (p. 451, footnote 4). They also reference coverage estimates of 97 percent and 95 percent for other periods (p. 421).

5 For a strong statement on how participation inequality translates into unequal political representation and influence, see Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (March 1997), pp. 1-14.

6 "No other country has a system where the lists of voters are prepared afresh, on a systematic basis, and so close to the time of voting, as does Canada" (Boyer, *Election Law in Canada*, p. 425).

7 Boyer, *Election Law in Canada*, p. 426. He does not explicitly indicate any source for the 98-percent figure; it may originate in a study of 12 by-elections in 1978 that Courtney and Smith ("Registering Voters") cite in their own work, though they note that the figure (98.1 percent) refers to the percentage of the names on the voters' list who were eligible (and thus is more a measure of accuracy than of coverage) (p. 364).

8 Norman Ward, *The Canadian House of Commons: Representation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 204 (cited on p. 416 in Boyer, *Election Law in Canada*).

9 Terrence H. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 22.

10 See, in particular, Kenneth R. Carty, "Citizens, Electors, Voters and Parties in Canada or The Case of the Missing Voters List," in Courtney, "Registering Voters" (pp. 41–48).

11 *White Paper on Election Law Reform* (Ottawa: Queen's Privy Council for Canada, 1986). For a mention of earlier official pronouncements, see Black, "The National Register of Electors," pp. 8-9.

12 *White Paper on Election Law Reform*, p. 39.

13 *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Parliament of Canada Act and the Referendum Act.*

14 More exactly, the last enumeration was conducted between April 10 and 16 in all parts of Canada except Alberta and PEI, where agreements had been reached to use the lists produced from their most recent provincial elections (March 1997 and November 1996, respectively).

15 Bill C-63 also altered the hours of voting in federal elections across the country, in order to ensure that the election results would be made public at approximately the same time.

16 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 2001), p. 58.

17 On terminology, Courtney rightly points out that the term "permanent voters list" is inaccurate since there are always changes to be incorporated into the register (whatever its form), which is why he prefers "continuously maintained roll." John C. Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks: Canada at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," in William Cross (ed.), *Political Parties, Representation, and Electoral Democracy in Canada* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 115-131, esp. p. 119. This paper uses the former term because its usage is more widespread.

18 Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks."

19 Those provinces were Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Quebec. No doubt, provincial developments (not explained here) were in some cases linked to the initiative taken at the federal level; this is a topic that merits investigation in its own right.

20 Black, "The National Register of Electors."

21 Black, "The National Register of Electors."

22 In a sense, the 1980 election constituted an earlier precedent since its proximity to the 1979 election led to a decision by Elections Canada not to carry out another enumeration. Still, the context was entirely different, with no thought at all being given to the idea of a permanent list. In fact, Courtney and Smith argue that the enumeration process at the time, which included a heavy reliance on revision, "proved that it is capable of responding fairly to instances of unanticipated crises" ("Registering Voters," p. 355).

23 *Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing* [hereafter, RCERPF], *Reforming Electoral Democracy: Final Report* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991).

24 Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks."

25 Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks," p. 125.

26 Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks."

27 See, for instance, Courtney and Smith, "Registering Voters," p. 358.

28 *1989 Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 1989).

29 *1989 Report of the Auditor General of Canada*, esp. pp. 8–10, 20, at http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/domino/reports.nsf/html/8910ce.html

30 RCERPF, *Reforming Electoral Democracy*, Vol. 2, ch. 4.

31 "Closed list" approaches, such as the one employed in Britain, have a closing date that typically makes it difficult for individuals to be registered until a new list is prepared. See, for example, Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada*, pp. 18–22.

32 At the same time, of course, receiving these lists earlier would be of lesser value if they contained many omissions and inaccuracies.

33 Elections Canada, "Discussion Paper on a Continuous Register of Electors" (Ottawa: Elections Canada, April 1994), p. ii.

34 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 35th General Election* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 1994), p. 25.

35 *The 1992 Federal Referendum: A Challenge Met: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 1994), p. 19.

36 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 35th General Election*, ch. 13.

37 The interview took place on August 22, 2000, at Elections Canada's headquarters, and lasted about two hours.

38 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, April 30, 1996. He responded by noting that Elections Canada has "been champing at the bit for this opportunity." See p. 1, at http:/www.parl.gc.ca/committees35...nce/10_96-04-30/haff10_blk101html.

39 House of Commons *Debates*, October 22, 1996, p. 2, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/hansard//088_96-10-22/088G01E.html

40 See, for example, *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 36th General Election* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 1997), p. 73.

41 It might be argued that this new orientation represents a natural and inevitable development in an agency preoccupied with operational imperatives and that the increasing emphasis on technology would have occurred even without the influence of the auditor-general's report. One also wonders if the attractiveness of a permanent list for Elections Canada, and for Kingsley personally, reflected a penchant for innovation within the new environment of commitment to technology – almost as an end in itself. Graham White offered this interpretation in his critique of the register at an IRPP-sponsored conference, "Transparency, Disclosure and Democracy: Assessing the Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations," held February 27, 2002, in Ottawa.

42 Elections Canada, "Discussion Paper," p. 1; the committee was formally known as the Steering Committee – Continuous Register of Voters.

43 Elections Canada, "Discussion Paper," p. 1, original emphasis.

44 The executive summary, for instance, lists the "compelling reasons" for considering the establishment of a register. They are (in the order listed): growing problems with the way enumeration works, the possibility of savings from shared lists across jurisdictions, the advantage of reduced election periods, the acceptance by Canadians of technology to provide services, the use of registers in other countries and the register as a fundamental building block leading to electronic voting. Elections Canada, "Discussion Paper" (p. i).

45 The report that the project team ultimately produced – *The Register of Electors Project: A Report on Research and Feasibility* – indicated the establishment date as in late 1994 (Ottawa: Register of Electors Project Team, submitted to Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Elections Canada, March 1996, p. 10). However, January 1995 is the date referenced in the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 36th General Election*, p. 11.

46 *The Register of Electors Project*, p. 10.

47 The savings estimate that Elections Canada would eventually use in public, as it made the "business case" for changing registration regimes, was $30 million. To be clear, this is the amount that would be saved for each general election or referendum held subsequent to the recouping of costs associated with building and maintaining the register. Of this amount, $8 million is connected to the shortened election campaign. A critical analysis of the financial dimension of the changeover, a subject that clearly merits attention, is beyond the scope of this study.

48 The following portrayal is essentially concerned with elite-level politics and accords virtually no role to mass opinion. Thus, it is in fundamental agreement with Courtney's characterization of "indifference on the part of the public" ("Reforming Representational Building Blocks," p. 125). That said, during the legislative process Elections Canada did state, on at least two occasions, that its surveys indicated public support for a register, first in front of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, April 30, 1996 (see p. 3 at http:/www.parl.gc.ca/committees35...nce/10_96-04-30/haff10_blk101html) and then during third reading of the bill, November 26, 1996 (see p. 8 at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/hansard//107_96-04-26/107eGO1E.html). The *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 36th General Election* also makes reference to supportive public opinion surveys (p. 12). Even if the survey results were not central to the pitch for the register, it is still unclear to what extent they could be construed as indicating strong public support. This is the case with regard to the summaries of two national surveys that Elections Canada made available to the author. The first, carried out by Angus Reid in July 1996, was limited to opinions about the sources that might be used to update a permanent list, and thus contained no evaluative questions about alternative registration systems or the principles they should embody. Moreover, proregister sentiment was no doubt accentuated, given the wording used in the survey's preface: "In order to eliminate duplication and reduce costs, consideration is being given to a process to replace federal enumeration." The second survey, carried out the following month by Environics, did not probe underlying principles, but did include general preference questions. One of the first questions was (unprefaced):

> Elections Canada, which is the nonpartisan agency responsible for organizing and conducting federal elections, has proposed that Canada develop a register of electors, sometimes called a *permanent voters' list*, that would be updated regularly and would replace door-to-door enumeration at each election. Generally speaking, do you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove or strongly disapprove of this idea?

Approval was overwhelming, with 76 percent signalling support, 38 percent strongly so. Furthermore, support went up to 83 percent when respondents were told (near the end of the interview) that the list would save $30 million for each election, and more should the list be shared. These numbers are likely inflated, in no small measure because Elections Canada was identified as the sponsor. A slanting effect seems particularly likely given that Canadians would have had little information about permanent lists and, in the absence of public debate, would have reflected little on registration systems. Indeed, it is telling that only 3 percent of respondents had no opinion on this question, an unrealistically small percentage for such a low-information policy area. (In contrast, two questions on voter registration in a 2000 survey sponsored by the Institute for Research on Public Policy explicitly allowed for "don't know" responses and found "no opinion" levels to be roughly 24 and 30 percent; these results are briefly discussed in the conclusion to the current paper).

49 *The Register of Electors Project*, p. 11.

50 For instance, at one point Gray praised the legislation during third reading by noting, "The register project also supports the goal of improved federal-provincial cooperation and the reduction of overlap and duplication." House of Commons *Debates*, November 26, 1996 – see p. 8 at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/hansard//107_96-04-26/107eGO1E.html

51 In fact, in 1998 the Elections Canada project team that developed the register won the Award for Leadership in Service Innovation presented by the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada and sponsored by Deloitte Consulting. A publication by the latter, *Elections Canada: National Register of Electors*, states that the register "eliminates the need for time consuming and expensive door-to-door enumeration" (Ottawa: Deloitte Consulting, no date), p. 1.

52 See also Courtney, "Reforming Representational Building Blocks," p. 125.

53 There is some Canadian literature demonstrating that incumbents do have an electoral advantage. See, for example, M. Krashinky and W. Milne, "The Effect of Incumbency in the 1984 and 1985 Ontario Elections," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 2 (June 1986), pp. 337-343, and by the same authors, "Some Evidence on the Effects of Incumbency in the 1988 Canadian Federal Election," in Leslie Seidle (ed.), *Issues in Party and Election Finance in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991). See also David Docherty, *Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

54 Several years later, following the 2000 election, one member of the Standing Committee, Carolyn Parrish, was quite candid in drawing the link: "You see, a short electoral period is really great for the incumbents because it puts everybody else at a disadvantage. We've been advertising for three and a half years, so we're in good shape." *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 13, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/ InfoComDoc/37/1/HAFF/Meetings/Evidence/haffev06-e.htm

55 The Reform Party's Stephen Harper complained about the rush to put the new system in place: "We are very con-

cerned about this. I cannot understate this. We are already playing a guessing game here in the opposition about the timing of the next election, and we don't want to play a guessing game about the length as well." *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, October 30, 1996, p. 8, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/committees35...nce/27_96-10-30/haff27_blk101.html

56 Opposition (Conservative) senators were more explicit in vocalizing their views about an advantage. Senator Murray said, "The government is in a hurry. I do not reproach it for that. I suppose that I, too, would be in a hurry if I enjoyed the lead in the public opinion polls which the government enjoys today." Senate *Debates*, December 3, 1996, p. 20, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/senate/deb-e/56db-e.html. His colleague, David Tkachuk, even wondered about the naïveté of the opposition in the House for not immediately recognizing the partisan nature of the matter: "Why is there such a rush? It is only for the purposes of having a 36-day campaign in the election. I guarantee you, honourable senators, that if the Liberals were at 30 per cent in the polls, we would not be rushing this through. As a matter of fact, the bill would not be here. It took a few days for the opposition in the other place to figure this out. I cannot believe that it took them so long, but we have been fighting the Liberals for a long time. We know them." Senate *Debates*, December 5, 1996, p. 12, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/senate/ deb-e/58db-e.html

57 The Reform Party was also against the staggered-hours provision that had been added to the bill late in the process.

58 In fact, some of the lengthiest discussions in the committee and in the House centred on privacy issues, particularly whether to include information on gender and date of birth, and on application of the 36-day campaign to by-elections – opposition parties feared that a snap call followed by a short election period would give them inadequate time to mount an effective campaign. (In the compromise solution, gender and date of birth are included in the register but not in the information made available to candidates or parties; in the case of by-elections, a minimum of 11 days is required between notification of a vacancy and issuing of the writs.) The implementation of staggered hours was also a topic of debate.

59 Liberal Party of Canada, *Creating Opportunity: The Liberal Plan for Canada* (Ottawa: Liberal Party of Canada, 1993).

60 Courtney and Smith, "Registering Voters."

61 *Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs*, December 10, 1996, p. 2, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/english/senate/com-e/lega-e/42ev-e.htm

62 See *The Register of Electors Project*, pp. 11–12.

63 Liberal MP Marlene Catterall, a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, can be singled out for her exceptional and consistent voicing of concerns about the impact of the register on participation and inequality. At one point she said that Elections Canada's approach "sounds a little bit like a version of negative option billing – the voter to take a positive measure to ensure he or she gets on the voters' list. This makes them different from somebody else who is put on the list as a result of the enumeration." She also worried that those who are illiterate, blind or speak another language would not be picked up in the updating process, which she suggested amounted to a "middle-class approach to publicity." Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, October 30, 1996, pp. 13, 15, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/committees35...nce/27_96-10-30/haff27_blk101.html. Catterall's continuing preoccupation with inclusion and fairness is evident in her exchanges with Kingsley during a Committee session held on November 21, 2002 – see pp. 55–56, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/2/HAFF/Meetings/Evidence/HAFFEV07-E.HTM

64 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 59.

65 See Jerome H. Black, "Reforming the Context of Voting Process in Canada: Lessons From Other Democracies," in Herman Bakvis (ed.), *Voter Turnout in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991), pp. 61–176. See also Richard Johnston, "Canadian Elections at the Millennium," *Choices* 6, no. 6 (September 2000), p. 13.

66 See, for example, Centre for Research and Information on Canada [CRIC], "Voter Participation in Canada: Is Canadian Democracy in Crisis?" *CRIC Papers*, October 2001.

67 Jean-Pierre Kingsley, quoted in "Liberals Ignore Winds of Change...While It's Familiar Shores for Chrétien," *Toronto Star*, December 30, 2000.

68 See, for example, André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau and Neil Nevitte, *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory: Making Sense of the Vote in the 2000 Canadian Election* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), esp. ch. 3; and Jon H. Pammett, "The People's Verdict," in Jon H. Pammett and Christopher Dornan (eds.), *The Canadian General Election of 2000* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), pp. 293–317.

69 Blais *et al.*, *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory*, ch. 3; Brenda O'Neill, "Generational Patterns in the Political Opinions and Behaviour of Canadians: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff," *Policy Matters* 2, no. 5 (October 2001).

70 See the comments by Louis Massicotte, as quoted in CRIC, "Voter Participation in Canada," p. 13.

71 For instance, André Blais found that turnout dropped by 3 percent, on average, in the 1990s among the 91 countries he examined. See *To Vote or Not to Vote: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 33–36. See also Mark Gray and Miki Caul, "Declining Voter Turnout in Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1997," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 9 (November 2000), pp. 1091–1122. While there is a consensus that turnout has been declining, there is some debate as to its extensiveness, its timing across democracies and the

uniqueness of the Canadian case. See, for example, Johnston, "Canadian Elections at the Millennium," pp. 14–15; and the references in CRIC, "Voter Participation in Canada," p. 6.

72 Were it not for the exceptional political developments in Quebec in 1993, particularly the rise of the Bloc Québécois as it mobilized the federal participation of nationalists, useful comparisons of turnout levels might have been made between the enumeration approach employed in the province and the (reused) list approach employed elsewhere.

73 Blais *et al.*, *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory*, p. 57. For some earlier evidence of the effects of contacting on turnout (and vote direction), see Jerome H. Black "Revisiting the Effects of Canvassing on Voting Behaviour," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 17 (1984), pp. 351–374.

74 Candidates would, of course, still get the revised and official voters lists, but their usefulness would be limited by the fact that they are received late in the campaign, the former 10 days before election day and the latter three days in advance.

75 And, of course, there are other explanatory variables that would need to be taken into account.

76 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 90.

77 André Blais, Antoine Bilodeau and Christopher Kam, "The Flow of the Vote Between the 1993 and 1997 Elections" (unpublished manuscript, no date). The slightly higher figure in this study may be due to the authors' taking emigration into account in their re-adjustments.

78 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 90.

79 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 90.

80 For the 1988 election, the coverage figure of 95.99 percent cited by Courtney and Smith in "Registering Voters" is used (see footnote 4 in the current document). Estimates of the age-eligible population are based on various Statistics Canada sources and the IDEA Web site, at http://www.idea.int/voter_turnout/northamerica/canada.html. Citizenship estimates were provided by Elections Canada, which had originally obtained them from Statistics Canada.

81 Citizenship estimates for election years, in particular, must be extrapolated from census data.

82 Elections Canada has published its own coverage estimates for these five elections – 95.5, 95.2, 95.9, 95.1 and 95.2 percent, respectively, indicating little temporal variation and no particular pattern. These figures are higher than those generated in this paper. According to one agency official, this is because of the use of unadjusted population counts, which are several percentage points below the corrected figures that Statistics Canada emphasizes. Still, assuming that the undercounting is consistent, it is unclear why the estimates provided by Elections Canada differ from the *pattern* shown in figure 1.

83 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 36th General Election*.

84 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 35th General Election*, p. 96.

85 Perhaps Elections Canada was able to take advantage of the focus on Quebec and concentrate its efforts and resources there.

86 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 62.

87 *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election*, p. 62.

88 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 21.

89 The report's "main objectives were to evaluate the levels of satisfaction among electors and stakeholders and to identify areas that could be improved." Elections Canada Research Studies, "2000 General Election Post-event Overview" (no date), p. 1, at http://www.elections.ca/ loi/rec/overview_e.pdf

90 Representatives included national directors, agents and members of Elections Canada's Advisory Committee of Political Parties.

91 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 13, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/ InfoComDoc/37/1/HAFF/Meetings/Evidence/haffev06-e.htm

92 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 10.

93 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 16.

94 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, pp. 20–21.

95 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 13. Incidentally, Parrish's negative allusion to the federal register in the Ontario context stems from the province's decision to use it to generate the preliminary list of voters for the June 1999 election (and as the first step in establishing its own permanent list). Critics complained that the information obtained from the register was out of date and that the revision process was too limited and poorly organized. It was argued that all of this, in conjunction with a shortened election campaign (from 37 to 28 days), depressed turnout, especially among the less established and the poor. In turn, this had partisan implications, giving the incumbent Conservatives the advantage. For comments and references on the Ontario case, see Black, "The National Register of Electors," pp. 16, 20–21 and footnote 45.

96 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 13.

97 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, March 1, 2001, p. 3.

98 See, for instance, Andrew Duffy, "Youth Tuning Out: Election Boss," *The Gazette* (Montreal), October 30, 2000.

99 The situation for new citizens appears to be better, though not perfect: Elections Canada reports that between 85 to 90 percent of new Canadian citizens agree to be added to the Register. *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, May 7, 2002, p. 30, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/1/HAFF/Meetings/Evidence/haffev63_e.htm

100 Elections Canada kindly provided the author with this data set. According to its information, "Ipsos-Reid con-

ducted a random telephone survey of Canadians that took place between November 28 and December 11, 2000. A total of 2,500 Canadians were surveyed." While the survey oversampled individuals between the ages of 18 and 34, the weighted version is used here. It is "representative of Canada's age and gender composition in accordance with 1996 Census data."

101 Not shown are 14 "don't know" cases, representing .5 percent of all respondents.

102 For those who were already registered, some corrections could have been made by telephone (e.g., address changes within the constituency), while others, particularly those involving a move to a new constituency, would have entailed a personal visit to the headquarters of the returning officer for completion of forms. Those who were not registered would have needed to apply in person to the returning officer (or, if they registered on election day, to other officials).

103 Blais *et al.*, in their survey of the 2000 election, *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory*, report a similar pattern with respect to age and not receiving a voter information card (see p. 60). In yet another survey, Pammett reports that young people, as well as lower income and lower educated citizens, "were more likely to report problems with being registered on the voters list" ("The People's Verdict," p. 312).

104 At the same time, students were among those most likely to take the initiative to resolve their registration situation – 9.6 percent, compared to 3 percent for the sample as a whole – reinforcing the inference that the category comprised exceptionally motivated young people.

105 These figures exclude those who took the initiative and those who replied "don't know."

106 The logistic-based results are not shown but are available from the author upon request. An exception where the OLS and logistic results are not similar is pointed out below in footnote 111.

107 An examination of the betas, standardized regression coefficients, which are more suitable for across-variable assessments, reveals a coefficient of -.26 for not receiving a card and -.21 for the lowest age category.

108 Ideally, party identification should have been included in the analysis, but it is not available in the survey. On the positive side, Blais *et al.* demonstrate that political interest and information about politics are more important as correlates (see *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory*). Even so, the measures on hand might seem to provide only an approximation of the kind routinely employed. Instead of a question on political interest, there is one on election interest – that is, how closely individuals followed the 2000 election: "very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely or not at all closely." The two knowledge items are subjectively based and not objectively determined, which would have been preferable. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they regarded themselves as "very knowledgeable, somewhat knowledgeable, not very knowledgeable or not at all knowledgeable" about the parties and their platforms and about the voting process ("knowing where and when to vote and knowing what other options were in place if you could not get out to vote on election day"). Still, the way these variables behaved (their impact on turnout and their correlations with other variables) suggests their relevance for present purposes and that they have not produced misleading results. Finally, both the item on citizen duty ("It is important that people vote in elections") and the item on efficacy ("My vote really doesn't matter") are based on a 0–10-scale, agree-disagree format (appropriately recoded).

109 At the same time, it might be argued that registration experiences themselves have a bearing on political attitudes, including the possibility that individuals will become more interested as a result of political contact during the campaign.

110 The impact of the new registration system on participation inequality is not necessarily limited to differences in age, income and the like. A geographical dimension may also be relevant. The degree of coverage and accuracy achieved by the register might be expected to vary from one constituency to another, in part as a function of population mobility; presumably, this would be most evident in differences between urban (especially city centre) and rural ridings. Interprovincial disparities may also be evident, due in part to differences in the sharing and updating arrangements established with the provinces and territories. These aspects (not explored here) require a careful analysis that should also include a comparative assessment of the performance of enumeration vis-à-vis geographical disparities in coverage. Elections Canada does maintain the raw data necessary for setting up the dependent variables for such an analysis in the case of the register (i.e., coverage and accuracy estimates broken down by jurisdiction and constituency).

111 A multivariate version of this analysis (which included all of the variables indicated in the third regression model shown in table 4) provides some additional support for the presence of interaction effects. Focusing on the most consequential registration situation, not receiving a voter information card, interaction terms were created by multiplying the dummy variable for this registration experience by each of those representing the two lowest categories for the age, income and education series of variables and then examining the impact of these "product terms" alongside the original (or "main effect") variables. Three significant interaction effects, all in the expected direction, were observed. One was for the lowest age group, with a coefficient of -.08 (p = .096) alongside main effects for age, -.07 (p = .012) and not receiving a card, -.09 (p = .012), meaning that not receiving a card accentuated nonvoting by eight points for those between the ages of 18 and 24. The two others were for the income variables with a coefficient of -.13 (p = .012) for those nonrecipients with an income of less than $20,000 and of -.08 ($p$ = .087) for those in the second lowest income bracket ($20,000–$39,999); interestingly, the coefficients for the income variables as main effects

were no longer statistically significant. Note that it is only in connection with this testing of interaction effects that the logistic analysis (see footnote 106) diverged from the OLS results: none of the coefficients for these six interaction terms achieved statistical significance, suggesting, as one reviewer put it, differences linked to their functional forms.

112 The survey sampled 1,278 adult Canadians during the period February 16 to April 2, 2000; the main results, though not the ones referenced here, are presented in Paul Howe and David Northrup, "Strengthening Canadian Democracy: The Views of Canadians," *Policy Matters* 1, no. 5 (July 2000).

113 *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, Evidence, May 7, 2002, p. 13, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/1/HAFF/Meetings/Evidence/haffev63-e.htm#Int-227341

114 *Modernizing the Electoral Process: Recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada Following the 37th General Election* (Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2001).

115 This was also the view of several speakers, most notably Graham White and John Courtney, at the IRPP-sponsored conference, "Transparency, Disclosure and Democracy."

116 Courtney and Smith, "Registering Voters," p. 433. Vote-encouraging activities may be especially important to ensure that enhanced coverage does not simply lead to the listing of *unlikely* voters who are relatively uninterested and uninformed. Indeed, without measures to promote participation itself, increased registration coverage may well lead to a lower official turnout rate.

choices

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IRPP

From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors:
An Account and an Evaluation
by Jerome H. Black

Résumé

L'adoption, en 1996, du projet de loi C-63 a modifié de façon substantielle le mode d'inscription des électeurs au Canada en créant un Registre national des électeurs : au lieu d'effectuer un recensement après la publication du décret de convocation des électeurs, on utiliserait maintenant une liste permanente. Dans cette étude, le professeur Jerome Black expose en détail les forces et les circonstances qui ont mené à l'adoption de cette réforme et évalue en quoi le nouveau système a influencé le taux de participation au scrutin.

Dans un premier temps, l'auteur définit et examine les facteurs qui ont donné lieu au changement. Parmi ces facteurs, l'auteur relève une préoccupation accrue à l'endroit des problèmes posés par le recensement, le désir d'écourter les campagnes électorales, la perspective de réaliser des économies, la possibilité d'éliminer le chevauchement des activités d'inscription entre différents paliers de gouvernement, le précédent établi à l'élection de 1993 alors que l'on avait utilisé les listes électorales compilées pour le référendum de 1992, et l'effet des recommandations de la Commission Lortie et du vérificateur général. Par ailleurs, l'analyse révèle le rôle clé d'Élections Canada, notamment celui du directeur général des élections, dans l'évolution de ce dossier. Le professeur Black soutient qu'Élections Canada a exploité des circonstances favorables à la réforme électorale pour préconiser l'établissement d'une liste permanente, en mettant l'accent sur sa faisabilité technique et économique ainsi que sur les avantages qui en découleraient. Qui plus est, Élections Canada a profité du fait qu'il était, à cette période, dans l'intérêt du gouvernement et dans celui des principaux partis d'opposition d'accueillir favorablement ce changement.

Dans un deuxième temps, l'auteur examine le lien entre le nouveau système d'inscription et le taux de participation au scrutin. Dans l'ensemble, son analyse indique que l'établissement d'une liste permanente a contribué à diminuer la participation générale en plus d'accentuer les écarts de participation entre les différents groupes sociaux. Ces effets négatifs sont particulièrement manifestes lors de l'élection de 2000, le premier test véritable du Registre national. En fait, les données qualitatives et quantitatives convergent pour démontrer qu'un grand nombre de Canadiens ont éprouvé des problèmes avec le processus d'inscription ce qui, en retour, a diminué la probabilité qu'ils participent au scrutin. L'impact a été ressenti de façon plus importante du côté de ceux qui n'ont pas reçu la carte personnalisée d'information de l'électeur, ce qui a réduit de façon disproportionnée le taux de participation des citoyens plus jeunes et moins fortunés. Les résultats suggèrent également que le processus d'inscription a augmenté l'asymétrie de participation au-delà de ces aspects situationnels.

Dans sa conclusion, le professeur Black présente certaines des mesures qui seront mises en œuvre pour accroître l'efficacité du Registre et recommande la tenue périodique d'un recensement à l'échelle du pays.

Summary

From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors: An Account and an Evaluation
by Jerome H. Black

In 1996, Bill C-63 – providing for the establishment of a National Register of Electors – was passed, thus changing Canada's method of voter registration from postwrit enumeration to a permanent-list approach. Jerome Black's analysis of the change in such an integral component of the electoral process has two objectives: to provide a detailed account of the forces and circumstances that led to the transformation of the regime, and to determine whether the new regime has had an effect on voter turnout.

The first objective involves identifying and discussing the factors that led to the changeover. These included increasing concern over problems with enumeration, the desire for shorter election campaigns, the promise of cost savings, the possibility of eliminating duplicate registration efforts between different levels of government, the precedent set in the 1993 election with the reuse of the voters lists compiled for the 1992 referendum and the impact of the Lortie Commission and the auditor general's recommendations. At the same time, the analysis underscores Elections Canada's role, including that of the chief electoral officer, as a key and proactive element in the process of change. Professor Black argues that the agency capitalized on circumstances favourable to electoral reform to advocate a permanent list, stressing its technical and economic feasibility as well as the benefits it could confer, at a time when it was in both the government's and the main opposition parties' interests to embrace change.

At the time, however, limited attention was given to the impact of the proposed shift on electoral participation. This leads to the second objective of this paper, an examination of the link between the new registration regime and voter turnout. By and large, the analysis indicates that the permanent-list approach has contributed to diminishing voter turnout and has accentuated existing participation gaps across social groups. These negative effects are particularly evident in the 2000 election, the first full test of the National Register. Indeed, qualitative and quantitative data converge to demonstrate that a large number of Canadians ended up in less than ideal registration circumstances, which, in turn, decreased the likelihood of their voting. The impact was greater for those who did not receive a voter information card, which thus disproportionately constrained the electoral participation of younger and poorer citizens. The results also suggest that the registration process increased participation inequality beyond these situational aspects.

In his conclusion, Professor Black notes some steps that are being planned to increase the register's effectiveness, but adds the recommendation that nation-wide enumeration be conducted periodically.